RESEARCH FOR CHANGE

Participatory Action Research for Community Groups

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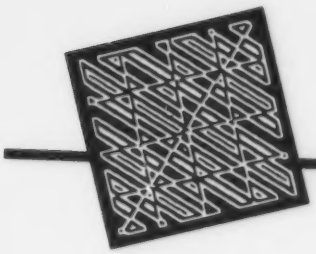
WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR

This guide is for community groups involved in social change.

- This guide is tailored to groups involved in grassroots community organizing around HIV/AIDS, around women's issues, aboriginal rights, or services for seniors, and so on.
- The guide outlines a method of participatory action research. For simplicity's sake, we usually refer to it as "action research."
- The guide presents a way to do research that is useful to your group's organizing work.
- The guide begins with an overview of the thinking behind action research.
- The guide provides a process for making the decision whether or not to do research, and how to build research into your group's overall work.
- It also explains how to design and carry out research, with a focus on practical information: how to identify the questions, and how to collect and analyse the information.
- In the section entitled Tool Kit, there are tools (or techniques) you can use to do the work.
- Fancy words are not important in this guide. We explain terms as we go along. Appendix A includes definitions of some of the technical terms you might run into.
- The appendices also contain useful background information about research.
- Throughout the guide, we give examples of different community groups' experience. We chose these examples because they reflect the kind of advocacy and educational work many groups do. They also show how AIDS groups, women's groups, and others, have used action research in their work.



PART ONE

WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH?

Introduction

This guide presents a way for community groups to do research that will help to improve the situation of people in the community.

There are many ways to do research. There are lots of good reasons for doing it. But we are focussing specifically on research for change.

Research is the systematic collection and analysis of information. We define **action research** as the systematic collection and analysis of information **for the purpose of taking action** and **making change**.

Our approach to action research emphasizes **participation**. Some people make distinctions between "action research" and "participatory research." We blend the two: our approach is participatory action research. We emphasize both research for the purpose of making change and community participation in the process. However, we usually call our approach "action research" because it's a simpler term.

We see research as part of an ongoing process for change. It's an aid to action and a tool for empowerment, not an end in itself. That's why we talk about the research process rather than research projects.

Action research is a way of getting the information we need as community activists to develop effective strategies. It uses qualitative methods which provide descriptions of situations and communities. The focus is on learning about how people actually experience the specific issue or problem. This knowledge is the key to knowing what actions will make a practical difference to people's lives and why.

Research isn't always necessary. Sometimes we know the issue. We know what will make a difference to the people affected by it. But if we need to check, if we have questions, then research may be a useful tool.

Research isn't magic. Research findings are meant to be applied. No matter how persuasive a piece of research is, it can't change anything unless it's acted on and used. We can use the insights we gain in many aspects of our work — from developing a service to doing advocacy.

Some of the most effective action research projects were never written up in a report. For example, one Indo-Canadian women's group used what they learned as the basis for a play to raise awareness about wife assault in their community. Some groups have made videos, to show people what's really going on in the community. Others have used what they learned to organize meetings to influence decision-makers or to reach out to others in the community.

The action in action research can happen throughout the process, not just at the end.

The key thing that action research makes possible is **the development of strategies and programs based on real life experience rather than theories or assumptions.**

Action research is also meant to strengthen and mobilize the group that does it. One way it does this is by increasing the group's understanding of the issues it's working on. The research provides a chance to test assumptions and to be surer of the ground we stand on.

It's also an opportunity for community members to work collectively and strengthen their connections with each other. The process of participating can build skills, confidence, and knowledge.

And going out into the community to do research may introduce us to people who could become new members or supporters. It can be a good way of raising awareness about our group and our issue in the larger community. It may also show us where obstacles exist and give us ideas about how to overcome them.

We can also take what we learn from doing action research into future actions and organizing in the community.

Our Research Approach

This method is designed especially for community groups

Our focus is grassroots community groups because they provide a way for people to express their concerns. By "community" we mean either geographic community or a community of interest — that is, people with similar experience or shared problems.

All kinds of discrimination are fought, first and foremost, by the people who are discriminated against. Effective public policy and programs depend on strong advocacy and input from people with first-hand experience of the issues. Community-based organizations have historically initiated the collective action that is necessary to improve the conditions of people's lives.

In the feminist movement, local women's centres and consciousness-raising groups provided the initial forum for women to speak about their experience. By listening respectfully to women's stories, femi-

nists learned what the issues were and got ideas about what actions to take. From this base, they organized services and advocacy on a wide range of issues. Grassroots women's groups, such as women's centres, rape crisis centres and transition houses, continue to be the cornerstone of the movement. They are the places where new issues emerge and strategies can be developed.

Community-based AIDS groups have given a voice to people living with AIDS and HIV. They have challenged society's assumptions about who gets HIV/AIDS and what it's like to live with it. They have also played a key role in insisting that society recognize the need for education and support services.

It has been self-help groups for seniors and for people with disabilities who have revealed new possibilities for themselves and their caregivers, as well as for health care professionals and policy makers.

First Nations people and people of colour have worked, from the ground up, for their basic human rights. One example is the way that First Nations are organizing to end the violence in their communities through reviving Aboriginal traditions and spirituality.

Community groups play an essential role in providing the means for people to act in their own best interests. Action research can help community groups to be grounded and strong in that work.

Community ownership and control are essential for community participation

In our approach, the people who experience the problem, or who are members of the community, have ownership of the process. Their experience is invaluable. They know how to involve other members of the community in the research process. They have insights into how to ask questions of people in that community. And their perspective helps in understanding the answers.

When community members have ownership of the research process, there's a better chance the research will be relevant to them. If it's relevant to them, they'll likely be more willing and able to act on it.

In our approach, community participants define the research questions and control the research process. They are involved in figuring out what the research process will be. They make the decisions.

People from the community also collect and analyse the research information themselves, or they help to do it. Researchers from outside the community may be called in to help. But the outside researchers must be committed to cooperating in the process and to learning, not just teaching. They must work at the direction of the community members — not the other way around. Their role is to help.

Too often, community groups have been expected to be passive participants in the research process. Researchers have seen them as valuable because they can provide access to a "research population," such as people living with AIDS. But many groups are refusing to have research done "to" them anymore.

Groups have a clear responsibility to protect their members or "clients" from exploitative research. To do this, groups must have control of the research process and community members must be full participants in the process.

To make community participation real, the methods used to collect information must be understandable, and must take into account people's special needs

The methods must make sense to people from the community. They must make it possible for people of various literacy levels to participate. As well, they must allow participation by people with hearing or sight impairment or other disabilities.

The research process must also take into account any other special needs people have. For example, people with day jobs will probably only be able to attend evening meetings. Some women's participation may depend on having child care available. Interviews or meetings with people with a physical disability need to be held in an accessible place. Many people may only be able to give limited time to the research process.

It is people who share the community's concerns and problems who will know best how to be sensitive and respectful in dealing with such issues. They must be involved in the decision-making for the research.

The decision-making process must be clear and accessible to participants

It will be necessary to decide which people from the community are going to have a say and why. What do they need in order to participate effectively? What do participants expect from each other? How will we communicate with the participants?

Clear decisions about these issues will provide guidelines or "terms of reference" to help keep on track and to deal with any problems that come up.

It will also be necessary to be clear about how the research process fits into the group's other work. Group support and a commitment to acting on the research results are essential.

But what about objectivity?

The idea of community control and ownership of the research process worries some people. They think that it will compromise the "objectivity" of the research. And they think that research must be objective to be good. Unless it's objective, they say, it will be "biased."

Our approach to action research challenges that.

Objectivity is defined as a distanced, external view "uncoloured by feelings or opinions." Taken to its logical conclusion, it is the absence of a point of view. But everyone - even a researcher - has a point of view and feelings or opinions that are impossible to set aside completely.

Bias is defined as "distortion of results by a neglected factor." Often the "factor" people neglect is the researcher's point of view. Pretending that people can put their opinions or feelings aside means ignoring an important factor in the research process. If researchers don't acknowledge their views, they are more likely to produce research that is biased. Declaring up front what the researchers believe about the issue is a way to guard against bias.

Our approach to action research acknowledges that people who are working to bring about change or deliver a service often share the experience and interests of the people they work for and with. Their perspective and knowledge is valuable in defining the research questions and in carrying out the research.

On the other hand, sometimes people in a group do not have first-hand experience of the issue the group is working on. They may have lots of assumptions they've never talked about. If these views aren't declared, they will still influence the research, but it won't be so easy to see how.

Rather than ignoring all of these assumptions and opinions, declare them. Stating them and recognizing them as part of what defines the research makes it possible to examine them throughout the process.

In addition, include a statement of assumptions in reporting on the research, so others can make their own judgments about what influenced the research.

How Action Research Works

The kind of research we're recommending provides an analysis of issues based on a description of how people actually experience those issues.

Asking people about their experience is the respectful thing to do. It also makes sense. It makes it possible to learn about social structures and their impact on people. This process can help us to see why the problems are so hard to solve, and what can be done about them.

We know that the majority view doesn't include everyone. Often it's the less powerful people who are excluded. In fact, the method of research we present in this guide was developed by feminists because women's experience was too often excluded from research. We needed a method to document and include women's experience. Until feminism, men's view was assumed to include women.

It's clear that other groups in society have been left out too. For example, until lesbians and gay men began to organize, it was assumed that the heterosexual view included everyone. Until anti-racist work is done, societies typically assume the dominant view is the only valid one. Young people make assumptions about older people's experience and views, and vice versa.

Research that begins with learning about people's experience of a particular issue or problem enables us to build realistic strategies. It respects the fact that we all have different upbringings, play different roles in the world, have different expectations, and that we don't experience the world in the same way.

How is action research useful?

All research begins with a question or problem. In action research, the main question is usually "how." How do people experience a certain situation? How can we change things? Most often, in action research, we ask these questions in intensive interviews. Sometimes we use focus groups or questionnaires.

The questions we ask are usually open-ended. They encourage people to talk about their lives and concerns.

Often people don't see themselves as being important enough to present information about their lives. They can't believe that their accounts of their situations could be a valid basis for understanding a problem or a community. The research may provide one of the rare times anyone wants to hear what they have to say.

One of the fringe benefits of doing action research is that it can affirm people's right to be listened to and understood.

The interview itself can also help people to get a new perspective on their situation. This, plus direct contact with respectful researchers who share their experience, may even encourage them to take action themselves.

The "how" questions are also useful to us as community activists. We often know that a problem exists. We know it from the people we work with, and likely from our own experience too. But we need to learn more about people's experience of it so we can know how to change things.

For example, we know that depending on a food bank is hard and we want to know how to make changes that would make life a bit

easier. We can find out by systematically asking some of the people who use the food bank. How do they manage? How do they think things could be changed to help them deal with the problems they face?

Sometimes we want to do research to convince people to change. Maybe we want to convince the government to change its policy or give us funding. Of course, it's important to remember that the research itself won't change anything. It can give us ammunition, but we still have to use it and act on it.

Doing action research is a chance to check our assumptions

Sometimes we realize we've been making assumptions about what works. For example, AIDS groups work to educate people to practise safer sex. They develop the best pamphlets and media campaigns they can. They may do evaluation too of how effectively the pamphlet or campaign communicates. The assumption is that education will make people change their behaviour. But what if education isn't working? Maybe research can help. How do people deal with sexuality issues? What motivates people to practise safer sex? What makes that difficult to do? Answers to these kinds of questions can point the way to more effective approaches.

Doing research to check what we take for granted is especially useful when we don't share the experience of the people our group works with.

Perhaps we are working to assist people in a community to have more say in the decisions that affect them. Rather than assuming we know what empowers people, we can check on how empowerment works for them. We might get them to describe situations where they have power, and where they don't. What does empowerment look like? What, in their experience, makes it happen?

It can help us make sense of our experience

Action research can be particularly useful in helping us to get a clearer picture of our community. How does it actually work from our perspective? How does our experience fit into the larger picture? How does the way the community works impact on our lives? What does it tell us about why we experience problems? Where are there openings for change?

Action research can help us to claim our own perspective and speak from our own experience. It can show us the richness and complexity of our own experience. With this knowledge, we are in a better position to develop realistic and workable strategies.

Example

Women living in single industry towns in the North often complained about "cabin fever." They got very depressed in the long winters and had difficulty dealing with their children or partners. Doctors and psychiatrists often labelled them as "depression with relationship problems" and prescribed tranquillizers.

Local women's groups doing research on life for women in these towns interviewed many of these women. They asked them to talk about life in their community.

These interviews led the researchers to look into what kinds of social services and recreation facilities existed in those towns. There wasn't much for women. They investigated housing conditions too. They discovered that most houses were built according to southern standards. There was no indoor play space for children. The men often were away for months working. The snow kept women and kids cooped up inside for long stretches of time.

The women's groups also reviewed studies that had been done about women's experience of taking tranquillizers. Many reported the tranquillizers made them more depressed.

Putting it all together, it was clear that cabin fever isn't an individual woman's personal inability to cope. It's a natural response, shared by many women, to inadequate housing and social services. Among other things, the groups organized programs to give women and children time apart. They lobbied for housing suitable for the northern environment. And they did educational work on what they'd learned about women's experience, for the doctors and social workers in town and for women themselves.

Principles of Action Research

Research should lead to action

Research is not an end in itself. To be useful, it must be part of an action plan. Right from the start we have to be clear about how we'll use the information we collect and analyse.

Often, groups assume they'll just write a research report and that will be action enough. They forget that, to be useful, a report has to be distributed and acted on. Who's the target audience? What will we do to reach them? How do we plan to interest them in the research report? What if we can't? What other strategies will we pursue? Is a report on the research actually necessary?

Some groups can't imagine doing an action plan before beginning the research. But being clear about action we might take can help us

avoid getting caught up in research for its own sake. We can always add to our action plan and change it if we come up with more good ideas along the way.

If realistic ways to take action on the research aren't clear from the very start, probably research is not the thing we need to do.

Work from the community's perspective

We need to build our theory and analysis from people's actual experience. So that's what our questions should focus on too.

The opposite approach is to base research on theories about an issue. Doing that can lead to looking at people's experience to see how it fits the theories. The focus becomes proving or disproving theories and trying to fit people in. It's easy then to miss what's really going on. We may also feel pressure to focus on what might convince decision-makers or funders. But if we start our research with the questions or concerns of people from outside our community, the research will serve their interests, not the interests of the people we're working with.

Keep it simple

It's the down-to-earth questions that let people tell their stories. Asking too many questions makes people divide up their experience. Then it's easy for the researchers to lose the full picture in its complexity. Often what we really need to learn about are the pieces that don't fit.

Also, if people are to participate in the research process, the methods have to be easy to understand and use. Complicated research methods can obscure the important questions and disempower the people the research is meant to serve.

And, of course, community groups don't have lots of time and money to spend doing research. We need realistic methods that will fit into our work without overburdening us.

Example

A group of transition house workers wanted to interview former residents of the house. They developed a list of research questions and designed a questionnaire. It was 10 pages long and had lots of checklists in it. It felt wrong. They tried again, asking themselves, "what do we really need to know?" They came up with an interview guide of five open-ended questions, with a few follow-up questions for each.

Said one researcher, "It's liberating! I'd begun to dread using our unwieldy questionnaire. Now we're all excited about the chance to talk with the women without that burdensome thing in our way."

Let the research questions determine which research tool to use

To figure out which tool will work best requires working through each of the research questions. Part 2 of this guide describes how to do this and how to develop the research tools.

It's important in this process to ask ourselves whether doing research is really necessary. Maybe we can take action, without doing research first. We need to check the research others have done, and figure out whether it answers our questions. We may have a very particular concern that others haven't addressed, but it's wise to check. We may also find information we can use later, to add to the findings of our own research.

Follow the action research rules

Action research, like any other kind of research, has rules. They are straightforward. There are good reasons for each one. The rules are guidelines to ensure that we do good research and that people can participate in the process. Since participation is essential to action research, it's important that the rules are easy to understand.

Here they are.

• The research has a design or plan

The research design outlines:

- the specific research questions,
- what kinds of information to collect, and why,
- how to collect it, from whom or where.

This makes it possible for everyone involved in doing the research to know what's going on. That, in turn, makes it easier for them to participate. The design or plan is a way of being accountable. It's like a road map. It allows others to see what our intentions were and how we're meeting them.

Putting the plan together helps the participants to be clear and focussed. Having an overall plan makes the process manageable. It's also the framework that makes it possible to see how to make any changes that become necessary during the research process.

• The questions or topics to be covered are agreed on in advance

This makes the process systematic. It also makes it possible to compare and analyse the information people provide. The research methodology is made up of these questions and topics, along with the research design and a description of how we followed it.

• The assumptions are declared

This will help to avoid producing biased research. It also makes the research process more open.

• The research respects the group's rules about confidentiality

A group must retain the right to restrict or deny access to its confidential files. Moreover, researchers must never talk about the research in progress, outside of the research committee. In addition the researchers must develop coding systems and rules that will protect the confidentiality of the people who are interviewed or answer questionnaires, etc. See Appendix H for more information on confidentiality and other research ethics.

• The analysis of the research information takes into account the experience of everyone who was interviewed or questioned

The aim is to produce an analysis that reflects the richness and diversity of what the people said. This is also how we fulfil our responsibility to the people who participated in the research. Would they be able to recognize themselves and their situation in our analysis? Keeping this question in mind will help us avoid jumping to conclusions.

• The research findings provide "checkable" evidence

We need to give our audience enough information to decide whether they would have reached the conclusions we did. Tell them what questions were asked, of whom, and why. We need to explain what we had assumed when we started the research, and what we learned. Give an accurate account of what the people said.

What if we want help with the research?

Many groups have successfully carried out action research on their own. The approach we're using here has been developed specifically to make that possible.

However, if we decide we want help, we need to take the time to figure out what kind of help.

Often groups think it would be easier to just hand over the whole thing to an "expert" researcher or consultant. But, of course, to honour its responsibility to its members and clients, the group will have to understand and direct the process. Also, the more involvement we have in the research, the more we'll learn and the better able we'll be to act on the results. So it's necessary to define the ways an outsider might help and how s/he will work with us.

One way is in the very early stage. Some groups have used a consultant to help them work through the process of sorting out whether they need to do research at all. The consultant meets with the group to discuss its questions and considers where to look for answers. The group then decides how to proceed.

Another possibility is at the point of putting together the research design. A consultant may be very helpful in suggesting how the various pieces can fit into one process. Again, the group itself must first identify all the pieces and make the final decisions.

A consultant can be useful if we get stuck on how to get answers to our research questions. Maybe s/he can work with the group to develop an interview guide. Maybe the group needs an outline of the possible research tools and how they work, in order to choose the ones that will work best. Or perhaps a consultant can provide information on how to do interviews or conduct a focus group.

Example

A People Living with AIDS (PLWA) group decided to do research to find out how to help PLWAs deal with discrimination in health care and housing, and so on. They knew that there are no simple answers. And they knew it would be important to look at many social and economic aspects of people's lives.

They knew of a researcher with an excellent reputation. They asked him to help. He listened to their research questions and went away to develop a research design. When he presented the design to members of the group, they disagreed with his focus. Basically, he proposed to do before-and-after testing of people who'd attended the group's workshops.

The group members found it very difficult to disagree with the researcher. After all, he was the "expert." They couldn't understand the details and the language, and the research methodology.

They decided not to do the research.

Eventually they found a consultant they could work with. This researcher understood their perspective and worked with them to develop a research design, and methods that reflected their questions.

What to look for in a consultant

For action research, a consultant must have particular skills. Here's a checklist:

- respects the group's responsibility and right to control the process
- understands the group's issues

- is not detached, but is committed to working with group participants to help them carry out the research
- is a good facilitator, not controlling
- is confident enough to be flexible, and is able to adapt methods to suit the group's situation
- is able to explain methods clearly, so that non-researchers can understand them
- is clear about what s/he can and can't do
- is someone the group is comfortable with

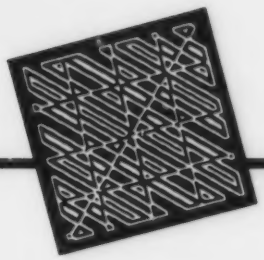
To find such a person will involve searching. It's often useful to ask other groups for their recommendations. Look in the community as well as in universities and colleges.

Interview any potential consultants. Ask for their views on the issues. Ask for examples of their work with other groups. Check with those groups.

Once the group has decided on someone, draw up an agreement of what the consultant's role is, and how the group and the consultant will work together.

Summary

This section has given you an overview of what action research is, how it works, and what its basic principles are. Part 2 takes you through the ten steps of putting the research process together.



PART TWO

PUTTING THE RESEARCH PROCESS TOGETHER

The Ten Steps

When you work through these ten steps you end up with a research design.

Doing this work requires lots of flipchart paper, masking tape, and felt pens!

When you've completed these steps, be sure to type up all your flipchart notes Keep them handy so you can refer to them throughout the research process. You can also use them when you need to describe how the research was put together.

The ten steps are:

1. **Deal with the planning and administrative tasks**
2. **Develop the information matrix - what do you want to know?**
3. **Do you need help?**
4. **Develop the research assumptions**
5. **Describe the research context**
6. **Define your research goals and objectives**
7. **Choose which data-gathering tools to use**
8. **Decide who your informants will be**
9. **Decide how many informants you need**
10. **Develop your data-gathering tools**

Step 1 is a mixture of planning and administrative tasks that take place at different times in the early part of the research. It's a very important part of the process, because it deals with how the research gets done, and by whom, etc.

You will need to complete Steps 2—10 in order, but you don't necessarily have to do them all at once. These steps will take you a total of 2 to 3 days to complete.

STEP 1 Deal with the planning and administrative tasks

NEEDS: Flipchart paper, felt pens, masking tape

WHO DOES THIS: Research committee

WHY DO IT: Administrative and planning tasks are often overlooked or treated as if they can be done later, or by somebody else! Both these tasks are important. Your research deserves a solid foundation within your group.

You can give some of the tasks to specific people to complete and bring back to the research committee. Or the research committee can work on them as a whole.

Here are the basic administrative and planning tasks necessary for any research, large or small. Make sure you discuss them earlier rather than later.

The tasks are:

- Be sure the research fits into your overall organizational plan
- Decide who's going to be responsible for the research
- Decide how decisions will be made
- Develop the research workplan
- Develop the research budget
- Develop the research design

Before you start your action research, take a few steps back. Think about your overall plan.

Research should not be done in a vacuum. It should fit, as a strategy, into the overall work and plan of your organization.

We're including information about planning in this guide because our experience is that many community-based groups begin actions, including research, without having an overall plan. This can be caused by simple lack of knowledge about effective planning. It can also be caused by funders telling you that "funding this year is for needs assessment or research"! Either way, you end up trying to do

research without thinking about how it fits, or doesn't, into your overall plan.

So, if your group wants to know where it's going, why, and how it's going to get there, use basic planning methods. Follow the Basic Planning Steps for Community Groups, in the Tool Kit, on page 69.

Decide who's going to be responsible for the research

You will need to develop a research committee, of 6 to 8 people, including:

- Group members who have information useful to the research.
- People who are responsible for overall direction of the group's work (board, collective, coordinator, etc).
- The people who will actually do the research.
- People from outside the group, with active involvement in the issue who can be useful to the work.

See Appendix G for information on researcher qualifications and hiring.

Decide how decisions will be made

- Decide who has the decision-making authority.
- Develop terms of reference for the research committee.

Here's an example of terms of reference:

The research committee will:

1. Design and carry out the research project.
2. Monitor the overall research process and modify as necessary.
3. Review, analyse and discuss the research data.
4. Be the official information link between the research project and the group (collective, staff, board, funder etc).
5. Respect and protect the confidentiality of the research data.

Develop the research workplan

A workplan is a way of organizing tasks that you will need to do to complete the research. Develop your workplan with a timeline, after you've completed Steps 1 to 10. See page 97. You'll need to develop the workplan before you can plan the budget. Appendix E has guidelines on how to develop a workplan.

Develop the research budget

Preparing a research budget depends on knowing what resources you are going to need to complete the research. Develop the budget after completing a workplan. See page 100. Appendix F has information about research budget issues.

Develop the research design

The research design will:

- outline your specific research questions
- explain what kinds of information you plan to collect, and why
- describe how you're going to collect it, from whom or where.

A research design helps you see the research as a whole piece of work. It also helps you to describe the research to others in a consistent way. You can also use it in funding applications, if you need funding for the research.

A research design is an outline that describes:

1. The purpose of the research
   - why you've decided to do the research, what your research questions are, and how you'll use the results.

2. The research assumptions
   - what you already know about the problem or situation being researched.

3. The context of the research
   - the situation in which the research is being done, for example, who the group is, the characteristics of the community or location you are working in.

4. The research goals and objectives
   - statements of what you intend to accomplish (goals) and how you intend to accomplish them (objectives).

5. The research methodology
   - how the research will be carried out
   - who's responsible for the work
   - how you plan to get answers to each of the research questions
   - where you'll go to get answers and why
   - how you'll collect the information
   - your rules about confidentiality
   - your work plan
   - how you plan to communicate your findings and to whom
   - ongoing action you are planning

Steps 2 to 10 will give you the information you need to develop a research design. Do not try to write a research design until you complete these steps.

STEP 2 Develop the information matrix – what do you want to know?

TIME: Approximately 2-3 hours

NEEDS: Flip chart paper, felt pens, masking tape

WHO DOES THIS: Research committee

WHY DO IT: Answering these questions gets all the ideas about the research out of everyone's head and on to paper. This process makes it possible to work together to shape the research. The completed information matrix will provide you with the heart of your research. Although it may seem at first as if it's a lot of questions to work through, you do need to do it.

How to develop the information matrix

List the following headings across the top of the flip chart paper

WHAT DO WE WANT TO KNOW?	WHY?	WHAT DO WE ALREADY KNOW?	WHERE DO WE GO TO FIND OUT?	WHO DO WE ASK?	WHAT KIND OF INFO IS NEEDED

Complete each column before moving on to the next one.

What do we want and need to know?

Include all ideas even if they are contradictory. Give everyone a chance to develop and sort out ideas. If differences come up, it is better to talk about them here rather than have them show up later on in the research process.

Why do we want to know this?

A good question to ask! It depends on what you're going to do with the answers.

The research questions are tied to what you're trying to accomplish. Right from the start you have to be clear about how you'll use the information you collect.

See Appendix B for a "research double check" if you wonder if research is the right strategy to use.

What do we already know?

Research ideas come from people's thoughts and actual experience. Answering this question lets you make use of the information you already have.

Where do we go to find out?

Where are the answers to your questions? Are you going to ask people? Are you going to read books on the issue? Are you going to review reports?

Who do we ask?

If you're going to ask people to give you information, who are you going to ask? If you need certain books or documents, where are you going to find them?

What kind of information do we need?

Do you need descriptive information? Do you need some numbers? Do you need stories? Do you need information that tells you what others think?

Answering these questions will help you make decisions about what research tools to develop.

NOW YOU'VE COMPLETED THE INFORMATION MATRIX

HERE'S HOW TO USE IT

Developing the information matrix encourages everyone to contribute ideas. Now, use the information in it to focus on the research. Things to ask as you look at the matrix include:

- How much do we want to know? Is it too much? Which questions are absolutely important and which could be eliminated? Do we want to know enough - are there questions we have left out?
- If we've ended up asking the same question twice using different words, are there ways we can combine the two questions into one?
- How do the answers to "Why do we want to know this?" relate back to the original problem or issue?
- If we already know some things - where is that information and how can we get it?

- Where do we have to go to get the information we need? What kind of research tools will help us get the information in a way that is useful to our overall needs?
- The answers to "Where do we go to find out?", "Who do we ask?", and "What kind of information is needed?" will tell us something about the kinds of data-gathering tools to develop. (Step 7 has information on making choices about data-gathering tools.)

When you've finished this discussion, move on to the next exercise. Keep the revised information matrix up on the wall.

What do we want to know?	*Why?*	*What do we already know?*	*Where do we go to find out?*	*Who do we ask?*	*What kind of info do we need?*
What are the family's past & current childcare arrangements?	To get a picture of what people do about childcare.		A range of families in the community.	Primary caregiver.	Their description, stories of family life & childcare situation.
What are the family's real need's now?	To understand their situation so we are better informed.		"	"	
What is the family's criteria for affordable, accessible childcare?	To know their real needs so we can work towards meeting those needs.		"	"	Description + comparable #'s (specific).
What is the family's cultural/custom preferences for childcare?	To learn, to I.D. potential barriers, because we don't know.		"	"	Description + stories.
What is their family situation? - constellation - language - culture - support network	To learn, get a picture, because we don't know.		"	"	Description + face sheet info.
What happens in their family's day? - work outside home - work in home - who cares for children (feeling's about that) - how choices (if any) about work are made - how do needs change over school year/time	To get a picture of family life because we don't know.		"	"	Description + stories of family life.
How is work/life outside &/ or inside home affected by present childcare situation - what choices are made (if any) & why	To get a picture because we don't know.		"	"	Description + stories

What do we want to know?	*Why?*	*What do we already know?*	*Where do we go to find out?*	*Who do we ask?*	*What kind of info do we need?*
How do families find out about children's services - subsidy - facility - health - social services - school	To learn how/if families actually get info about community services.		Families + Service providers.	Primary Caregiver. Person in charge of service.	Description
How long have the family lived in the neighbourhood, Canada?	To get a picture, because we don't know.		Families.	Primary Caregiver.	Face sheet info.
What attitudes & values do families have regarding potential service providers?	To understand. To I.D. potential barriers.		Families.	Primary Caregiver.	Description
What childhood services would families actually use if they were in place?	To see what's feasible & not feasible.		Families	Primary Caregiver.	Description
Who's out there behind the doors? - # of people - age breakdown - income levels - cultural breakdown	To draw demographic picture of area.	We already have some of this info from previous research.	Census City		Stats (info for whole comm'ty) + face sheet info from informant.
Who do present service providers serve?	To learn where the gaps are.		Service provider.	Person in charge.	Specific #'s + types.
What do they provide, & why, what are they *willing* to provide?	To learn. To compare with family needs.		"	"	Specific #'s + types + description.
What do they think the needs are of the people they serve?	To compare with families' stated needs.		"	"	Description
What resources exist for service providers to do their work (i.e. organizations, money, commitment)	To learn reality of service provider situation.	We know some of this from our own experience.	"	"	"
What difficulties do they face in providing these services?	To learn. To identify institutional barriers.		"	"	"
What do they think about how to make the system work for those using the services?	To help us figure out what suggestions are most practical, will work.		"	"	"

About the information matrix example

This information matrix was developed for researchers to find out how to develop more effective services for children in a particular community.

It's an example most groups can relate to.

The research documented people's needs, and that's typical of the kind of research many community groups do. It found out how people use (or don't use) a particular service, and why. That's also typical of the kind of research many groups do.

The research:

- Focused on understanding how people live.
- Gave the group the opportunity to listen to how users of the service identify their own needs.
- Included a consideration of the many cultures in the community.
- Used a variety of data-gathering tools to get the information.

We include more examples from this particular project to illustrate the steps in the research process.

STEP 3 Do you need help?

TIME: Approximately 30 minutes

TOOLS: Flipchart paper, masking tape, felt pens, and your information matrix

WHO DOES THIS: Research committee

WHY DO IT: This step helps you find out what expertise exists in your group and what expertise has to come from elsewhere. Discussing this as a group will help you take advantage of everyone's contacts and networks.

How to do it

Look over your information matrix from Step 2. Then take a piece of flipchart paper and list the following headings across the top:

WHAT KIND OF HELP DO WE NEED?	WHY?	WHO DO WE NEED TO GET HELP FROM?	HOW DO WE APPROACH THEM?

Start with the first question and work your way across the flipchart, rather than completing a full column at a time.

What kind of help do we need?

Advice about the topic? Help with the research tools? Letters of support from people concerned about or involved in the issue? Help in deciding whom to interview? Help in finding informants? Help with language translation or interpretation?

Why do we need help?

Be sure to answer this clearly - you'll want to describe exactly what your needs are when you're asking people for help.

Where can we get help from?

What about support from the community, cooperation from the "target" population, or help from an adviser or consultant?

How do we approach them?

Phone call, letters, a meeting, a linking person who knows them and knows you?

When you have completed this exercise, keep the flipchart up on the wall and move on to Step 4.

How to negotiate with a consultant

If you've identified places in the process where you need the help of a consultant, you will have to negotiate for what you want. These steps can help you to negotiate successfully.

1. State clearly what you want help with and why. Describe the relationship your group wants to have with the consultant. Assert your group's responsibility and right to be in charge. Use these statements when you interview each of the consultants you might work with.

2. Ask the consultant for responses to your statements. Ask how s/he would propose to work with you. Ask for examples of the consultant's work with other groups. Check with those groups to learn about their experience.

3. Ask the consultant why s/he is interested in working with you. What does s/he expect to gain? What would s/he consider a successful result of the research? What are her/his views about your group and the issues you're working on?

4. Ask for an explanation of a method or two. Why would s/he use it? How would it work? What rules would s/he follow? Are the explanations clear? Do they make sense to you? Would they be clear to the people you expect will participate in the research process? If not, this is not the consultant you want.

5. Be sure to discuss money. Agree on what the consultant will be paid and when. You can tie payment to specific pieces of work or to specific times in the process. You may want to hold back part of the money until the work is completed and the group is satisfied with it.

6. When you have selected the consultant you want to work with, take the time to review the decision with the whole research committee. Be sure everyone agrees about the committee's role, and the consultant's role.

7. Meet with the consultant to discuss how you will work together. Agree with the consultant on her/his role and responsibilities, and on the committee's role and responsibilities. Be sure to write down your agreement. Date it and sign it. Have the consultant sign it, too.

8. Remember, the consultant's role is to help you do research. You will then take action on the issues you're concerned about. You're in charge.

STEP 4 Develop the research assumptions

The research assumptions developed from the information matrix described on p. 29, included these two assumptions:

"There's a lack of culturally appropriate children's services."

"We don't know what culturally appropriate children's services are."

Here's what the researchers found by talking with the families:

- The parents did not expect, or want, children's services to be multilingual. However, the parents wanted information about services available to them in their own language.
- Many parents worked at two or three jobs. Because of this, they seldom had the energy to be involved in children's activities outside the home.
- For many families, culturally appropriate children's services means having extended family members (aunts, grandparents) take care of the children while the parents work. This was the preferred form of childcare, and was not considered a matter of "making do."

The research findings told the researchers that "culturally appropriate" services should:

– take into account a family's economic situation

– not be focused only on children's language needs

– reflect the time the family has available to use the service.

TIME: Approximately 1 hour

TOOLS: Flip chart paper, felt pens, flip charts for steps 2 and 3

WHO DOES THIS: Research committee

WHY DO IT: Assumptions are what you take for granted. When you say what you take for granted, you can all be clearer about the views that influence the research.

Taking things for granted without talking about them can cause misunderstandings. What one person assumes, another may never have thought of, or may have thought of differently.

Having a list of assumptions about the research does not mean the research has to prove these assumptions to be right, or that the research is bad if it doesn't match the assumptions. The research will inform you, one way or another, about your assumptions.

How to do it

Take a piece of flipchart paper and title it:

What assumptions do we have about this research topic?

Using the "What do we want to know?" list from Step 2 as a focus, ask everyone to state their assumptions - what they consider to be true about the topic. Don't worry about stating the obvious - just say it!

- List everyone's assumptions.
- Talk about the assumptions.
  Do people have widely different values or ideas about the topic? Talk about whatever differences of opinion there might be. Why do they exist? What is really at issue here?
- What do the assumptions tell you?
  Should you revise the research focus? Should the work go ahead? Should you narrow or widen the focus of the research? Are there some people who now realize they really don't want to do this work? Are there people who now feel more strongly about the work getting done?

- Ask questions to make sure you understand one another.
- From your discussions, develop a list of research assumptions that you are all comfortable with.

When you have completed this exercise, keep the flipchart pages. Type up your assumptions for everyone in the research committee to refer to as they do the work. You can also include your assumptions in any report you prepare on the research.

Now move on to Step 5.

Example of Research Assumptions

Here are the research assumptions developed for the research described in the information matrix on page 29.

1. There are many school-age children in parts of this community area who are in unsupervised situations from 3 - 6 pm.
2. There is a lack of childhood services in this area.
3. Two major barriers to the use of existing childhood services are affordability and accessibility.
4. There is a need for a broad range of childhood care services and they will be used if they are available.
5. Expectations of childhood services will vary, depending on class and culture.
6. Family childcare needs are always changing.
7. There is no coordinated approach, within community or government, to the delivery of childhood services.
8. Families want their children to be safe and well cared for.
9. People tend to make their choices based on what they are familiar with. Their past experience influences present choices.
10. If there are support services for unlicensed care for children, it can be equally as safe as licensed care.
11. Appropriate care for children includes in-home care and out-of-home care.
12. There's a lack of culturally appropriate children's services.
13. We don't know what culturally appropriate children's services are.
14. There is not just one multicultural view.
15. This community is multicultural; it is not homogeneous.
16. Major policy and p ogram changes are going to be required for real change to occur.
17. More women with young children are in the labour force.
18. We don't know how families arrange their work and family life.
19. We don't know what families do for childcare, or how they do it.

STEP 5 Describe the context of the research

TIME: Approximately 45 minutes

TOOLS: Flipchart paper, masking tape, felt pens

WHO DOES THIS: Research committee

WHY DO IT: Research does not take place separately from other events in your group, community or workplace. Part of the reason for deciding to do research might be the need to change or influence the world you live in. Being clear about what influences you may help you decide what to do with the research results.

How to do it

Take a piece of flipchart paper and list the following topics down the side. Change or add to the list to suit your own situation:

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COMMUNITY

YOUR OWN GROUP

SOCIAL SERVICES, HOUSING, HEALTH CARE

ECONOMIC SITUATION

POLITICAL CLIMATE

FUNDING SOURCES

MEDIA

For each topic on the list, consider and write responses to the following points.

COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS - Size, geographical location, population economic base, cultural make-up, population turnover.

YOUR OWN GROUP - Where and how does it fit into the community? What issues is your group addressing that affect the rest of the community? What's the community response? What's your reputation?

SOCIAL SERVICES, HOUSING, HEALTHCARE (OR...) - What's available? At what cost? What's good/problematic about each? Are there

programs or services for the people you serve or issues that concern you? How do these services affect your group/issue or the people you serve? Who's not being served?

ECONOMIC SITUATION - Jobs, business, unions, working conditions. What's the situation for people in your group? What's the situation for people in the community generally? How does this affect the work you do?

POLITICAL CLIMATE - Politicians, boards, political parties, levels of government. How supportive are they of the concerns you've identified? How do their policies affect you and your concerns? How open are they to change? What connections do you have?

FUNDING SOURCES - Is local, provincial, regional, federal funding available? How receptive are funders to the issues you're concerned about? What strings are attached to funding?

MEDIA - What's the coverage of issues you're concerned about? What problems/successes have you had with media? Does the group have basic media skills? Do you have connections with media?

Review what you've found out and ask:

- What does this mean for the research?
- What does this tell you about who you should be talking to on this issue?
- What does this tell you about who might encourage, or block, your work?
- What does this tell you about how you might use the results of this research?

When you have completed this exercise, keep the flip chart paper up on the wall and move on to Step 6.

STEP 6 Define your research goals and objectives

TIME: Approximately 1-2 hours

TOOLS: Flipchart paper, masking tape, felt pens, flip charts from steps 2 to 5

WHO DOES THIS: Research committee

WHY DO IT: Now it's time to focus on the research goals (what the research intends to accomplish) and the research objectives (what work will be done, over time, in order to meet the goals).

By the end of this exercise you'll be able to say, with confidence, "This is what the research is about and this is how we're going to do it."

How to do it

- Look at your list of research assumptions (from Step 4) and your list of "What do we want to know?" (from Step 2)" Look for statements that are similar in meaning. Group those statements together. When this is done the overall topics will become clear.
- Make decisions about which topics could or should be eliminated, which should be woven together with others, which should stand alone. Use the list of research assumptions to help you decide.
- Don't feel badly about eliminating topics. You can't do everything.
- Look at the groups of topics and write a sentence that describes each one clearly in terms of "this is what this research is going to accomplish."

These are your research goals. Most groups develop 4 to 8 goals.

- For each goal, ask the question, "What specific action or activity will we do by a given point in time in order to reach this goal?"

Answer the question with separate sentences for each action or activity.

These are your research objectives. Most groups develop 1 to 3 objectives for each goal.

Examples of research goals and objectives

Here are the research goals and objectives for the research described in the information matrix on page 29.

RESEARCH GOAL (what the research will accomplish)	RESEARCH OBJECTIVE (what we will do specifically, by a given point in time, to reach the goal)
Research Goal A To find out how families living in this area live as families.	**Research Objective 1** We will use, in the first part of the research, an interview process to obtain descriptions from families of how they live as families.
Research Goal B To understand how, and if, family childcare situations affect the lives of families.	**Research Objective 2** We will, in the interviews, ask families how childcare affects their family and working lives.
Research Goal C To understand how community families view, use and know about childhood services in the area—how they have used them, how they use them now, how they would use them in the future, and why.	**Research Objective 3** We will, in the interviews, ask people to describe their use of current children's services in the community.
Research Goal D To develop a useful demographic picture of family life in this community.	**Research Objective 4** After the interview process is completed, we will design a questionnaire to ask specific questions of a larger number of different families about types of services they might use, time they would use them, range of cost they could afford, types of programming, etc.
	Research Objective 5 We will review, during the course of the research, relevant census data and civic statistics and reports in order to develop a specific demographic picture of family life in this community.
Research Goal E To find out what childhood services are already provided in the community, why, who provides them, who uses them.	**Research Objective 6** We will gather whatever written information we can find about local children's services.
	Research Objective 7 We will consult with key service providers to find out what they identify as children's services in the community.
	Research Objective 8 We will interview service providers about their experience of providing childhood services in the community.

STEP 7 Decide which data gathering tool to use

TIME: Approximately 30 minutes

TOOLS: Flipchart paper, masking tape, felt pens, and the results of Step 2 on developing the information matrix

WHO DOES THIS: Research committee

WHY DO IT: This step gives the whole committee the opportunity to make final decisions about which data-gathering methods will work best. The tools you use will make your data collection systematic. They ensure that researchers cover the same topics or ask the same questions in the interviews or focus groups, for example. Systematic collection of the data will allow you to compare similarities and differences in the responses people give.

Note: Do not develop the data-gathering tools now, save that for Step 10. See pages 71 to 82 for samples of some data-gathering tools.

How to do it

Review the research goals and objectives. Then look at your information matrix from Step 2. What did you write down in the columns headed:

- Where do we go to find out?
- Who do we ask?
- What kind of information is needed?

The answers you wrote will lead you towards the right data-gathering tools. The box on the following page, entitled Data-Gathering Tools, will help you decide which tool to use tc get the kind of information you need.

Once you have made your choice(s) of data-gathering tools, go on to the next step.

Data-Gathering Tools

Action research can include the use of any of the following data-gathering tools.

1. Interviews

- Use interviews when you want detailed descriptions of how people experience a situation.
- Interviews can be conducted in person or over the telephone.
- Interviews usually take from 1 to 3 hours to complete.
- Writing up each interview takes about as much time as the doing the interview.
- We encourage researchers not to use tape recorders but to "train one's ears to listen" and write while the informant speaks.
- Interviews can be a way of having in-depth contact with people. This contact may help you to interest these people in your group's ongoing work.

2. Simple questionnaires

- You can use these to ask people for their opinions or concerns about an already defined problem/issue.
- Questionnaires can provide a sketch, rather than a detailed picture, of people's experience.
- While all research tools protect confidentiality, a questionnaire also allows people to remain anonymous.
- Self-administered questionnaires require that the people who fill them out can read and understand the questions.
- Questions can be closed ("check 'yes' or 'no'") or open, (when informants answer in their own words), or a combination of both.
- Closed questions are analysed by counting responses. Analysing these responses usually takes less time than interviews.
- Open questions allow for more description, They are analysed by identifying the themes or patterns in what people tell you.

3. Focus groups

- They can be used instead of interviews or questionnaires, or to add to information from interviews or questionnaires.
- Focus groups make it possible to get the perspective of several people at one time.
- One advantage of focus groups is that participants can compare experiences and encourage each other to discuss concerns.
- Focus groups are effective when the topic is one people feel comfortable discussing in a group setting.

4. Popular education techniques, such as drawing

- You can use these techniques in focus groups to involve people who can't read, or who are not comfortable with group discussions, or whose first language is not the language of the group doing the research.
- Drawing is also a good tool to use when:
  - you want a visual picture to show others how a situation is experienced.
  - you want to get a better understanding of people's situation before developing other data-gathering tools
- There may be some resistance to the idea of doing a drawing because people feel they "can't draw. " Be sure to stress that the exercise is not meant to produce a work of art.
- One way of including drawing in your research process might be to:
  - have one group of people do the drawing
  - show the drawing to other informants during, for example, their individual interviews, and ask them to put themselves in the picture — document their responses.
  - compare the similarities and differences.

5. Face sheet

- Completing a face sheet—for each interview or questionnaire, or on each participant in the focus group—will give you basic demographic information on your research population. The researcher can fill out a face sheet at the start or end of an interview or focus group or drawing exercise. Or people can fill it out when they are completing a questionnaire.
- See the Tool Kit, page 81, for an example of a face sheet.

6. Literature review

- A literature review can involve investigating records. Records are written statements already prepared by someone to describe an event, for example: hansard, court records, birth records, city directories.
- A literature review can also involve investigating documents. Documents are written or filmed materials such as letters, memoirs, diaries, speeches, newspaper articles, government publications, photographs, and policy statements.

You may wish to use a number of action research data-gathering tools

You can use one of these tools, or you can combine them. For example, you may want to do some interviews and some focus groups. You may want to concentrate on focus groups, and integrate the popular education technique of the drawing exercise into the groups.

STEP 8 Decide who your informants will be

TIME: Approximately 30-60 minutes

TOOLS: Flipchart paper, masking tape, felt pens

WHO DOES THIS: Research committee

WHY DO IT: You must be able to describe how and why you made decisions about which informants you chose. Informants are the people who are going to respond to your research questions through interviews, questionnaires, or focus groups.

How to do it

There are no magic methods regarding your choice of informants, or the number of informants. Research that uses the kind of qualitative method that we focus on in this guide does not claim to represent everyone. But it does have to represent the experiences of the informants.

Who you decide to interview depends on:

- The time and resources available.
- What you need to know.

Some techniques to use:

Snowball technique

Start by choosing people you know who are involved in or concerned about the issue. Then ask those people to name others.

Example:

The researchers who used the information matrix outlined in Step 2 chose informants by first contacting neighbours of the 6 local interviewers. They also contacted people who used childhood services at a local community centre. The informant list grew from that point.

Because the researchers needed to understand the needs of a range of families, they chose informants from the 6 major cultural groupings of the community.

Issue-based selection

If you are working on a specific issue or concern, you can choose as informants people who share a concern about the issue.

Example:

If you are doing research focused on understanding the needs of people living with AIDS, you could, for example, ask people in an AIDS hospice to be your informants.

Things to consider when you are selecting informants:

- Experience: Have the informants had the experience that you want to find out about? How do you know they have this experience?
- Availability: Will they speak to you? Can you locate them or do you know someone who can? What language(s)/translation services will be needed to speak with them? If people have disabilities, what are the accessibility issues you need to think about?
- Range and variety: Different people have different experiences. Do the people you've selected reflect the range of experience you want to know about?

STEP 9 Decide how many informants you need

TIME NEEDED: Approximately 30 minutes

TOOLS NEEDED: Flipchart paper, masking tape, felt pens, and information from Step 2

WHO DOES THIS: Research committee

How to do it

There is no rule that qualitative research must involve a certain number of people, or that you you need to do a certain amount of counting in order to be valid.

The qualitative action research we're describing in this guide does not generalize from its findings. This means no matter how many people you speak with, the research claims to represent only those people, not a larger population. The research is representative of the people you speak with. The research findings are not used to say how big a problem is. They're used as a way to develop a deeper understanding of a problem or situation.

The kind of research we suggest in this guide is small scale, but intensive. It usually involves anywhere from 10 to 100 people as the basic research population.

Choosing the number of informants depends on:

- Research time available.
- Number of researchers who can contact the informants.
- What kind of information you need in order to provide descriptions of people's situations as they experience them. Remember, you can't include everyone, but you do want enough information to be able to develop a descriptive base that increases knowledge of the issue.
- The data-gathering tool(s) you've chosen. For example, interviews can provide a rich description of concerns if you want to know how the informants experience a problem, but interviews take a longer time to complete. You can administer a large number of questionnaires over a short period of time but they won't give you as complete a description of people's experience.

STEP 10 Develop your data-gathering tools

TIME NEEDED: Approximately 3 hours, plus follow up time for revisions

TOOLS NEEDED: Flipchart paper, masking tape, felt pens, and information from the previous steps

WHO DOES THIS: Researchers, reporting back for decisions by the research committee as a whole.

How to do it

1. Gathering Data by Doing Interviews — Tools for doing interviews

Aide Memoire

What it is

- A list of topics that an interviewer covers during an interview. It is not a questionnaire, but a topic guide that reminds researchers of the topics to cover with each informant.
- Aide memoire means "guide to memory." It allows the interviewer to act more as a prompter than a questioner.
- Using an aide memoire allows a researcher to gather information in a very open and exploratory way.

How to develop an aide memoire

- Review the research goals (Step 5) and the part of the information matrix that asks "what do we want to know" (Step 2).
- Identify the major topics you want to cover.
- Do not choose too many. Between 8 and 10 are likely enough.
- Use the rest of the "What do we want to know?" points to develop "prompts" or sub-topics that you can use to ask for more information.

Example of an aide memoire

"We want to understand how moving from being HIV positive to having full-blown AIDS has affected your use of the community around you. We will first ask you to describe how you participated in your community when you were HIV positive. Then we'll ask you to describe how that has changed since developing AIDS, and why you think this is so.

"Our overall aim is to understand how the community and its services can best meet your needs now."

Topics:

Work	Shopping
Housing	Friends
Recreation	Transportation
Culture/entertainment	Social Services
Education	Health Services

Probes:

How things have changed, and why, since you developed AIDS.

An Interview Guide

What it is

- A series of fixed but open-ended questions asked with probes to cover different aspects of the topic. Asking the same questions ensures consistency, and covers the same topics in each interview.
- You can ask additional questions during the interview if necessary. Just be sure to include them in the final write-up of the interview.
- Try to have no more than 6 or 7 basic questions in your interview guide.
- Interview guide questions are open-ended. You ask the informants to answer in their own words and you write down what they say. The purpose is to let people tell the researchers about their experience and their understanding of the issue.
- Interview questions are more specific than those in an aide memoire.
- Each interview usually lasts about an hour-and-a-half to two hours.
- Doing intensive interviews with twenty to thirty people usually gives a very clear picture of people's experience of an issue.

How to develop an interview guide

- Review the research goals and objectives (Step 5) and the part of the information matrix that asks "what do we want to know." (Step 2)
- Identify the major issue areas you need to cover.

- Turn each into a broad open-ended question, or several questions.
- Be sure that each question area stands on its own. Revise to see that you're not asking the same question twice.
- Review the questions and delete any unnecessary ones.
- Develop a list of points for each broad area to help you probe for more information if you need it. Use the "What do we want to know?" list in Step 2.

Example of an interview guide

This is the interview guide developed for the research described in the information matrix on page 29.

1. Tell me about your family
   Probes: - who's in it?
   - how long have you lived in neighbourhood, Canada?
2. Tell me about what happens in your family's day
   Probes: - who goes to school/when/when home?
   - who goes to work/when/where?
   - what happens to the children when they're done with school?
   - rest of family?
3. What is it like for you and your family living in this neighbourhood?
   Probes: - do you know people/who/how do you know them?
   - how do you find out about services/activities/events in the area?
   - what services do you use? how do they work for you? what would be helpful?
4. Tell me about the arrangements you make for the care of your children now.
   Probes: - what, why, how needs change?
   - how do you feel about these?
   - effects of child care on other parts of your life?
   - overall, how does this work for you?
5. What kinds of children's services would best meet your family's needs?
   Probes: - interested in? preferences?
   - why would this be better?
   - if you were planning for children/families on your street/for people you know/your cultural community, what would you plan? Why?
   - how would you let people know about the programs?

2. Gathering Data Using a Questionnaire

What it is

- A questionnaire is a series of questions. They can be either open-ended questions, or a check-off list, or a combination of the two.
- You can use a questionnaire in a number of ways. You can give it to the informant to complete while you are present. Or you can ask the questions of the informant and fill in the information s/he gives you Or you can send it to the informants by mail, or drop it off for them to complete on their own. The informants can mail back the completed questionnaire, or you can pick it up.
- Questionnaires provide a sketch rather than a detailed picture of people's experience.

How to develop a questionnaire

- Review the "what do we want to know" part of the information matrix (Step 2) as well as the research goals and objectives (Step 5).
- List the major items you want to ask questions about.
- Develop as many questions as you think you need for each theme area. Remember, long questionnaires can be intimidating. To make sure you get a good return, ask what you need to ask and no more!
- Decide which questions should be open and which should be closed, depending on your needs.
- Review the list of questions:
  - each question must be clear
  - each question must be one question, not two in one
  - each question must relate to a theme area
- Take out questions which are:
  - repetitive
  - unclear
  - unnecessary
- Number each question separately.
- Try out the questionnaire by pre-testing it on an informant.
- Discuss the results of the pre-test:
  - was each question understood?
  - did your overall research needs get met with the responses to the questions?
- Remove or add questions as needed.
- Decide how you will administer the questionnaires. Will the informants fill it out on their own and send it back? Or will they fill it out while you are with them? Or will you ask the questions and write down the answers?

- Think about how people will return the questionnaires. If you use a mail out, and ask for people to return them in the mail, you can send out a lot but you have less control over how many get back. Hand delivering and picking up takes more time and energy but you'll get a better return. Follow-up phone calls to informants can also increase the number you get back.
- See the example of a questionnaire in the Tool Kit, on page 78.

3. Gathering Data Using a Focus Group

What it is

- A focus group is a group of people with similar experience whom you can call together to discuss topics related to the research.
- Using a focus group is a way of interviewing a group of people at one time, rather than individually.
- Focus groups make it possible to get a group's perspective on an issue. One advantage is that participants can compare experiences and encourage each other to discuss concerns.
- Focus groups are effective as long as the topics are ones people feel comfortable talking about in a group.

How to do it

- Choose focus group members by using the same methods for choosing informants on page 43.
- The focus group meeting can take place anywhere as long as you provide privacy for the discussion. You can meet in people's homes, around the kitchen table, for example.
- A researcher (or two) will facilitate the focus group's discussion, and take notes.
- Usually one of the researchers records the discussion in the group on flipcharts for all the participants to see while they're talking. Bear in mind, however, that some participants may not be able to read or may not be able to speak the language being used. A flipchart may not be appropriate. Instead, one of the researchers may choose to take notes of the discussion. An interpreter may be necessary.
- The researcher who facilitates the focus group will use an aide memoire, an agreed-on list of topics, to guide the discussion.
- You can combine the drawing method of data-gathering with a focus group discussion.
- Write up the flipchart notes (or researcher's notes) afterwards. Try to record the whole discussion rather than just key points.

4. Gathering Data by Using a Popular Education Technique—Drawing Our Experience

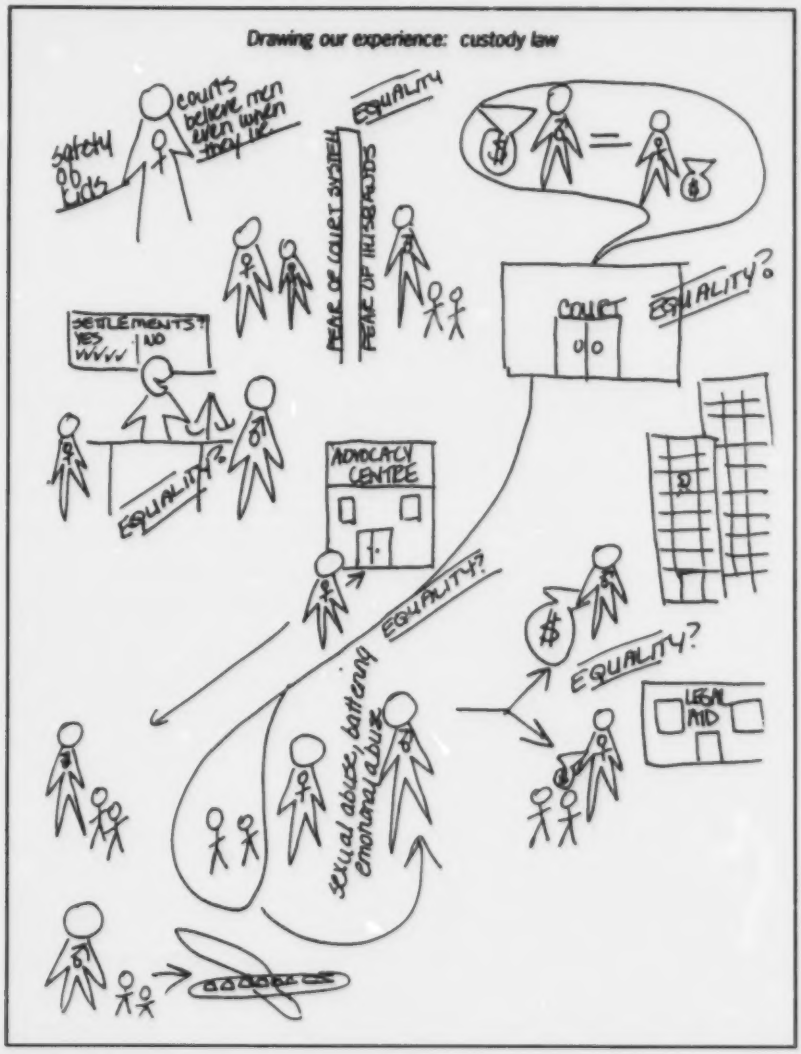
What it is

- It's a drawing of people's experience. Having participants draw a picture of how they are affected by an issue, or their life in the community, for example, encourages discussion. It also makes a record of it in a visual way.
- The drawing allows people to see the relationships between various parts of their lives, and each other's experience.
- You can use drawing as a way to do a group interview.

How to do it

- Tape large pieces of newsprint or flip chart paper to the walls and have felt pens for everyone. Invite a member of the group to take charge of the drawing. Or several members may wish to take turns.
- Begin by asking people the most basic question you can about the issue and how they experience it.
- Get everyone to draw themselves in the middle of the drawing (or have the main drawer put them in). If everyone is already part of an established group, the group can go in the middle. You may wish to use a circle or some other symbol you can all agree upon.
- Then let each person tell how the issue affects them directly or indirectly.
- Draw in all the things that affect that person's experience.
- Draw lines and arrows to show how things are connected and to show where the barriers are.
- Remind everyone that it is their perspective you want to work from so put in everything they know.
- When the drawing is complete, ask the group to discuss what the drawing says about "What's happening to us?" and "What's our life like?"
- Researchers should make detailed notes about what people say in these discussions. Later, analyse these notes in the same way as notes from a focus group or an interview.

Example



5. Gathering Data Using a Face Sheet

What it is

- A face sheet provides basic information about informants, such as age, gender, etc. This information is called demographic data.
- All interviews or questionnaires should include a face sheet.

How to develop a face sheet

- Go back to the information matrix in Step 2 and see what it tells you about the kinds of demographic information you need.
- Ask only what you need to ask. Often informants are uncomfortable with these questions and may, in fact, decide not to respond to some of them. Our experience is that people whose first language is not English or French, especially when they are new to the country, often have concerns about why these questions are asked.
- Information that is always included on the face sheet:
  - informant's code name/number
  - interviewer's name
  - date, place and time (start/finish) of interview
- Information that is sometimes included on the face sheet:
  - why informant chosen
  - number/type of contacts made to informant (phone, letter, etc.)
  - informant's relationship to project
  - informant heard about research from...
- Demographic information to consider asking, depending on need:
  - age
  - relationship status
  - education
  - income
  - number of children
  - geographic/neighbourhood area informant lives in
  - length of time lived in area
  - occupation.

See the Tool Kit for an example of a Face Sheet.

6. Gathering Data by Doing a Literature Review

What it is

- A literature review is a review of material written on the subject you are researching.
- Doing a literature review helps researchers get a sense of what others are saying about the issue, and how your research fits or not. You may find that the research you're planning to do has already been done.
- A literature review can also provide statements and analysis that add to what informants have already told you about their experiences.
- A literature review can provide approaches to the issue, which you can then discuss in your own research.

- Materials for a literature review can include articles, books, conference proceedings, pamphlets, policy documents, etc.

How to do it

- Begin early by collecting materials you think will be relevant to the research. Literature review work can continue throughout the research process.
- On a file card, or a filemaker computer program, note the points that relate to your research questions and the patterns you are finding in the data gathering. (Always include chapter, page number, etc. in your reference.) Write down any points you think your research should make about what the literature says on the issue.
- Towards the end of the research process, go through your literature review notes to get a sense of the whole picture. Look for common theories, useful statements, gaps that exist. For example, if none of the materials reviewed dealt with an issue that you know is important, note there is a "gap" in the literature review and try to locate an appropriate reference. If no reference can be found at all, note this as a "gap in the literature" and indicate it in the final report, if you are writing one.
- Discuss the results of the literature review with the research committee - see how it fits with other data you are gathering.
- Keep an accurate list (bibliography) of all the literature you review. This means that for each item you read you must list the author, title, publisher and the publication date. If you are writing a final report, include this as your bibliography.

7. Gathering Data Using Journals and Logs

What they are

- A journal is a day-to-day account of what's happening in the informant's life, with her/his comments about what's important, and why.
- A log records the number and type of day-to-day events or contacts over a specific period of time. For example, you can ask informants to use a log to record the number and type of daily phone calls.

How to use them

- You can use a journal to gather information about people's experience of an issue. This typically involves asking each informant to keep a journal for a period of a week or two. They record their experience and ideas.

For example, take a people living with AIDS group's research about empowering groups. The data gathering could include asking some informants to use a journal to record and discuss their experiences in the group.

- Researchers can also use journals to document the research process.
  - keeping a journal provides an understanding of how and why decisions were made about the research
  - each researcher can keep a journal; or one researcher can keep the project journal
- If the research involves using a log book, all the people involved must use it consistently. For example, to keep a log of telephone calls, everyone must use the log and record information in it in the same way.

OK, now that you've completed the ten steps...
you can finish the administrative and planning tasks listed in Step 1!

You've done the 10 Steps and you're confident about your plans. Now's the time to complete the unfinished business in Step 1 (see page 26). Remember? You need to:

- Write the research design
- Develop the research plan
- Develop the research budget

One or two of the researchers usually complete these tasks, over a period of a week or two. When they're finished, the research committee as a whole meets to review and discuss the design, plan and budget.

Take a look at the chart on page 56. It outlines all the tasks involved in doing the research. It estimates the amount of time it usually takes to complete each one. You will need to do this kind of estimating to reflect the size and the nature of the research. You'll use this information to figure out the budget.

No matter how large or small your research is, be sure to:

- Estimate interviewing time realistically (be careful—it's easy to underestimate).
- Allow at least as much time to analyse and interpret data as you did to gather it.
- If you're going to write a report, allow twice as much time as it took to gather and analyse the data. Don't forget time for editing, revisions, production and printing.

Appendix E tells you how to develop a workplan, using the example of an actual project.

TIMEFRAME

STEPS ONE–TEN

– takes 2-3 days if done back to back, usually done over a period of weeks.

WRITE RESEARCH DESIGN

DEVELOP RESEARCH WORKPLAN
DEVELOP RESEARCH BUDGET

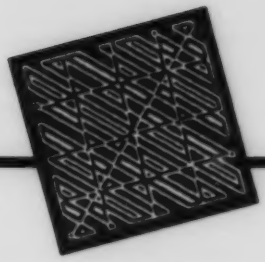
GATHER DATA e.g.

1 interview = 2 hrs. to do and
2 hrs. to write up
4 hrs.

Therefore, allow 1 day for each interview.

ANALYSE AND INTERPRET DATA

TAKE ACTION ON THE DATA
(IF WRITING A REPORT ALLOW TWICE THE AMOUNT OF TIME IT TOOK TO GATHER AND ANALYSE DATA)



PART THREE

GATHER THE DATA

By now you have decided which action research tools you are going to use. These may be in-depth interviews, or questionnaires, focus groups, or drawing exercises. They may be a combination of several of these.

IMPORTANT: See the Tool Kit for techniques for doing interviews or focus groups, and for administering questionnaires.

For All Data-Gathering:

- **Approach your informants in a consistent way.** Whichever tools you choose to use, you need to approach all of your informants in a consistent way. The following tips help you do this.

  Develop a short explanation about the research and why you are doing it. You can give this statement to informants and to others who ask about the work.

  Having a consistent explanation allows everyone involved in the research to speak about the work in a similar way. This is important, especially when you are doing research in a smaller community or when the research topic is controversial.

  You can use the written handout if the local media asks for comment.

- **Do not discuss the research process or findings with anyone** outside of the research committee while the research is in progress. Coming to conclusions before all the data has been analysed is unfair to participants, workers, and the project. It also can betray confidentiality.

- Contact informants. Explain the research goals and ask them if they would agree to take part. Tell them how long the interview/questionnaire/focus group/drawing exercise will take. Briefly describe the topics. Explain the confidentiality arrangements.

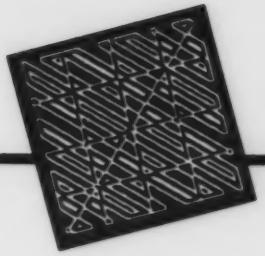
- Make arrangements for the interview/questionnaire/focus group drawing exercise. Or make arrangements for meeting with informants about the questionnaire, or about dropping it off.

- Be sure to get the full name and home address of all informants so you can send a thank-you letter afterwards, and let them know about the results of the research.

Protect Confidentiality

- Confidentiality is important in research. Protect the confidentiality of informants during and after the research process. Protect the confidentiality of the research process and content during the research. For more information about confidentiality and other research ethics, see Appendix H.
- Keep a record of how you are protecting confidentiality. If you write a final report, include this information in the methodology section.
- Decide on the method to be used to code informants:
  - use made-up names, or
  - use numbers, letters, or a combination
  - make a habit of referring to the informants only by their code.
- As informants are located, develop a master informant list with each informant's name, code, address and phone number. Make a copy of this list and file both original and copy in a locked drawer or filing cabinet.
- Write the informant's code name/number on the front of the interview or questionnaire when you type the finished copy.
- If informants name people, places or things that could identify them, protect their confidentiality by removing or changing names of people and places, ages of children, etc, especially if you are writing a final research report. This is particularly important when working in a small community. But do not remove or change any identifying information until after you have analysed the date.

Remember: The Tool Kit provides techniques for doing interviews or focus groups, and for administering questionnaires.



PART FOUR

ANALYSE AND INTERPRET THE DATA

What Analysis Is

Research analysis is the process of bringing order to the data, organizing what is there into patterns, categories, and basic descriptive units. Interpretation involves attaching a meaning and significance to the analysis, explaining descriptive patterns, and looking for relationships and linkages among the descriptions.

The challenge of research analysis is to gather together all the varying bits of data, examine them, talk about them, think about them, and weave them together into a whole.

Remember, in qualitative research you are guided by what the informants have told you. You do not begin with your own preconceived ideas and fit what the informants have said into them.

Protect confidentiality by discussing research and analysis and interpretation with the research committee members only.

When To Start

You can begin to analyse the data early in the research process but the major analysis and interpretative work happens after all the data has been gathered.

How To Do It

While the research is in progress

- The research committee should meet on a regular basis to discuss what they're learning from the research data.

  Things to discuss are:
  - what does the data say so far?
  - are we getting as much information as we want and need?
  - what's missing?

- if something's missing is there another way we can collect that information? If not, we'll have to note that as a "need for further research."
- can we isolate any patterns yet?
- what are the significant findings so far?

- To protect confidentiality, do not discuss the research data or what you're finding while the research is in progress.

After all the data has been gathered

1. Photocopy and file all the original data. Work with the copies.
2. Be sure to code or number each piece of data with its code name/number so you can trace who said what.
3. First, review all the data. Read and re-read each interview or questionnaire or the notes from the focus groups or the drawing exercise. Start to make notes on what you see. Use your intuition. Look for patterns of response.
4. Make another copy of all the data and cut up or separate all the data into theme or question areas. Remember to put the informant's name/number code on each piece. File responses in file folders or envelopes marked with each question/theme.
5. Look at all the responses to each question or topic, one at a time. Look for repeated patterns of response. Make notes on what you find.
6. Use key word analysis to track words or descriptions used by informants. Key word analysis means going through the responses to each question and noting all the words or descriptions people used to talk about the same thing. This will begin to give you an overall picture of the issues or topics that you can think about and discuss.

   EXAMPLE: In response to a question about people's community involvement during an economic recession, the following phrases were pulled out of the interviews by using key word analysis:
   - don't get involved
   - tend to withdraw when I'm unemployed
   - less involvement
   - we don't put down any roots here
   - haven't been able to do anything
   - friends constantly leaving
   - have made more commitment because of recession
   - careful when I get my welfare cheque, don't want people knowing

The following sentences were written to reflect the key word analysis: "In response to a question regarding people's community involvement during a recession, most said they used their community less. People described feeling less involved, or wanting to withdraw due to bad feelings about being unemployed or being on welfare. One woman, however, felt she had made more commitment to her community and was making a point of shopping at local small businesses and helping with the development of support groups for unemployed people."

7. Start a list of interview quotes that you think will be useful. Be sure to put the interview code name/number beside each quote so you can refer back to it if necessary. (Of course, if you write a final report, omit the code name and numbers.)

8. Do whatever counting the data requires. For example, a questionnaire may have a series of "yes/no" answers that need tabulation. You will also have to analyse and add up the entries in a telephone log. You can also add up the number of similar comments people made on a topic in the interviews.

9. Go back and review your research assumptions. What links are showing up between the gathered data and the research assumptions? Did you find what you thought you would? Are there other assumptions you've picked up while you were collecting the data?

10. Discuss significant results or conclusions with members of the research committee. Reach agreement on what you think the research findings are saying. If you can't agree, decide how you'll deal with the differences.

11. If possible, take some time away from the analysis. Sometimes even a few days away will help you approach the analysis with a fresh perspective.

12. Return to the data analysis and reflect on what it means. Rework and refine it as necessary

13. Remember, stay with what your informants have told you - let what they said guide the analysis.

14. Compare the literature review findings with the other data. Note the links and gaps.

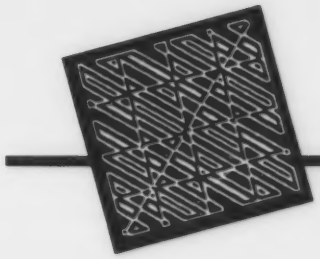
15. How you present and use the research findings will depend on the decisions the group makes (or has already made) on the action to be taken as a result of the research.

16. Whatever action you decide on (report, workshop, meeting, video, brief, etc), be sure to do enough analysis to allow you to talk about your research findings in a clear way.

17. Prepare to respond to questions both about how the research was done and the research findings.

Talking About Your Research Findings

- Do not make unfounded claims about your research. For example, if you've received information from 35 people do not claim that your findings represent the view of all people or the whole population in the community or workplace or situation you've investigated.
- You can and should claim that your findings represent the views of the people interviewed or questioned and that their concerns are valid.
- You can and should point out how the informants' views help you to understand the issue or problem, and what action to take as a result.
- Remember to talk about why you decided to do the research in the first place.
- Describe how you did the research. Consider writing a simple description of the process which you can use to explain how you did the research and why you did it that way.



PART FIVE

TAKE ACTION ON THE RESEARCH

There are lots of actions you might take. Here are some examples.

A group working on women's health issues in Newfoundland did focus group interviews in fishing villages along the coast. Women told them about what really made a difference to health in their communities. It wasn't just nutrition and stress and the kinds of things the researchers assumed affect health. In fact, the main concerns were lack of adequate sewage systems and no sidewalks.

The group organized workshops focussed on the issues the women had identified. The aim was to give participants a chance to work out some strategies they could use in their own villages and also how they could work together. The report on the research described not only the interviewing and issue analysis but also the workshops and the process of organizing for change.

This example underlines several important points.

- Research may reveal different issues than you expected. It's essential to respect and act on what people tell you.
- The research process can include things like workshops that enable you to take action during the research process, not just at the end.
- The interviews themselves were a way of reaching out to women and communities the group hadn't worked with before.
- The action plan for this project included:
  - working with the women who were interviewed on what would make an immediate difference to them in their communities;
  - for the longer term, building ways to continue to work together, and
  - a report that was useful both to the group in its lobbying and to other organizers, and that satisfied the funder's need for a "product."

An AIDS group is doing a project that involves interviewing people who are having particular problems dealing with social services agencies. The interviews will help researchers to understand the

range of problems, what it's like for the people living with AIDS/HIV, and what they suggest to improve things.

Researchers will then organize meetings focussed on these issues bringing together people from both the agencies and the group to work out solutions. This process is designed to empower the people with AIDS/HIV, to let them know they are not alone in their experience of their difficulties, and to involve them with decision makers in developing practical strategies for change.

Another group has done action research that used participatory theatre methods. Their aim was to find a way of hearing from people who were reluctant to attend meetings and take part in discussions. They held workshops where people from the community participated in learning theatre techniques and doing exercises that allowed them to raise their issues and concerns.

The project also involved training people who could take the process to other communities when this specific project was over.

The research and the action went together. No report was written.

A key in all of these examples is action. The focus is not on a report of the research but on using the research process, as well as the findings, to make change. The action was built in from the beginning as part of the process. All the groups collected and analysed information about the experience of people in the community. They followed the rules for doing good research. But the research was not separate from action.

Of course, reports can be useful too.

The Women's Research Centre did a project in 1982 that focussed on what changes in the justice system would provide battered women with better protection against further assaults. From our interviews with women we drew a chart of their experience of how the justice system works. We used this chart to map out what the system would look like if protection for battered women was a priority. We took both charts to people in the system, such as police officers, judges, crown counsels, and family court counsellors. We asked them about their experience and what would make their jobs easier. We got their comments on the charts too.

Through the process itself, we developed good contacts with systems people. We also learned about the issues and about how the systems work from the perspective of insiders as well as outsiders.

But the focus of our action plan was the report.

We wrote a report that included recommendations about what had to be changed in the system. We sent the report to all the people we'd

interviewed and to transition houses across the country. And we sent it to government officials and agencies.

Battered women said it was good to have their experience affirmed. Transition House workers found the charts of the systems helped them see more clearly where to act.

Some government officials met with us to talk about how to implement some of the changes we'd recommended. New policy was passed that we thought would really make a difference. We worked hard with other groups to be sure it would be put into action. We did public education. We lobbied. We did training sessions for systems people. Ten years later, the policy is still not widely followed. People in the system can and do ignore it.

Looking back, the real strength of that project was not that the report led to new policy. It is what we learned about how the systems work. That's what we and others take into our day to day advocacy and support work with women on these issues. It means we take more effective action. We also have more realistic expectations about the impact of changes in policy.

Plan your action in advance. Adjust your plan when the research is completed.

We recommend that groups develop an action plan before beginning to actually do research. Be sure to include things you can do during the process, as well as at the end. Be sure to build in evaluation of your work, too. It will help you to keep track of what you're learning, and to build on it.

Once you have collected and analysed the research information, it's important to review your original action plan. Review what you had intended to accomplish. Put that together with what the research tells you about how to proceed. If the research indicates something you hadn't anticipated, pay attention to it. Let what the research has told you guide your future action.

To consider what your next step should be, take a couple of hours to identify some possible actions and how to carry them out.

Here's one way to do this.

- In a meeting of the group, list on a flip chart, **what you want to do and what you want to change**. For each one, note **why**.
- Decide what your **priorities** are, and why.
- Draw four columns on the flip chart with the headings: **ACTION**, **DETAILS**, **WHO**, and **WHEN**. Take each of your priorities in turn. Under "details", list all that will be involved in carrying out that action. Then decide who will do the work and when they will complete it.

This will help you decide where to begin and why. It will also give you a chart to help you keep on track. In addition, having an action plan makes it possible to evaluate your work and learn from it.

If one of the actions you want to take is writing a report, decide what kind of report. There are at least three possibilities:

- a full report on your findings and the research process;
- a summary report - perhaps for a funder or as the basis for community meetings or negotiations with decision makers; or,
- an internal report for the group's own use.

To decide on which combination is best for your situation, consider these questions:

- How do we intend to use the report? What can a report help us to accomplish? What does that tell us about what we must be sure to include in it?
- Who is our "audience"? Who do we want to reach and why? Don't forget your own group members and your own community. Think of people who would benefit from the information you'll provide, and people you want to influence or get support from.
- What is the best way of reaching our audience? What kind of report will make sense to them? Verbal reports in community meetings may work better in some cases. Maybe you have the material for a book. Maybe a video.
- How will we interest people in the report? What promotion can we do? News releases? A flyer? Meetings or workshops?

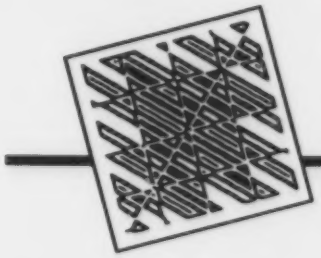
See Producing a Research Report in the Tool Kit. It outlines the steps in writing a report. It also provides a publication planning sheet and a production checklist.

Conclusion

So there it is. You've seen all the steps that go into an action research process. Now it's over to you.

We hope you can work with the process and make it come alive in your community.

Good luck! Let us know how it goes.



TOOL KIT

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BASIC PLANNING STEPS FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS

- A planning session should take place once a year. Most organizations find it useful to do this before the end of their fiscal year. Then the plans and budget can be used for funding proposals.

Although there are variations in planning styles, all planning methods include the following steps:

1. Review the purpose of the group

- Who are we, what is our purpose - the overall reason why we exist.

2. Define the issues for the group

- If you've evaluated the work done in the past year you'll know what these are.
- See Appendix I for resources to help you evaluate, identify problems and solve them.

3. Develop goals and objectives

- Goals are **broad general statements of what we want to accomplish.**
- Objectives are **specific, measurable statements of what we want to accomplish by a given point in time** in order to meet the goals.
- See Appendix C for examples of goals and objectives.
- You can develop overall long term goals with specific objectives that you update each year, or
- You can develop new goals and objectives every year.
- Let the experience and results of past work guide you into present plans.

4. Develop strategies for achieving your objectives

- Strategies are a series or group of activities carried out in order to reach an objective.
- What's the best strategy for us to use to get to our goals and objectives? Brainstorm as many ideas as possible.

- **One strategy to choose is research**. Others include workshops, advocacy, training sessions, lobbying, networking, providing a service, making speeches, writing letters, putting out a newsletter, making a video, protesting, etc.
- Think critically about your list of strategies. Test the ideas using the pro/con sheet, resources review and "five key words" method in Appendix D.
- Choose which strategies you want to use and be clear why you think they are the best ones.

5. Develop a group workplan

- Outline activities.
- Develop a time schedule.
- Decide what resources you need (money, people, equipment, knowledge, skill etc).
- Assign jobs and responsibility.
- See Appendix E for workplan instructions.

6. Evaluate your work throughout

- Review the objectives - what did you achieve?
- What did you learn from the process of the work, the content and the results
- Where do you go from here? What can you build on from your work so far?

For your evaluation

You may wish to use Keeping on Track, the Evaluation Guide for Community Groups (published by the Women's Research Centre, see Appendix I). It outlines a method of evaluation which has been developed especially for non-profit community groups with a social change orientation. It describes a method of evaluation known as participant focused evaluation.

Groups can use this method of evaluation to carry out a self-evaluation. Or groups can use it if they are being evaluated externally, at the request of a funder.

These six steps form the backbone for any group's planning. See Appendix I for a list of resources to help you with planning.

HOW TO DO AN INTERVIEW

Before you start

1. Contact informants. Explain the research goals and ask them if they would agree to be interviewed. Tell them how long the interview will take. Briefly describe the topics to be covered. Explain the confidentiality arrangements.
2. Make arrangements to interview them, preferably alone, without partner, children or colleagues around.
3. Be sure to get their full name and home address so you can send a thank-you letter after the interview .
4. Choose something hard to write on such as a clip board, and use a coil-bound notebook for writing in as the pages are easy to turn. Take two pens that work!
5. We encourage researchers not to use tape recorders because the process of writing encourages you to pay close attention to what is the informant is saying. Writing what the informant says is one of the best ways to learn to rely on your own head and train your memory. Tape recorders can also break down. If you do choose to use a tape recorder, be sure the entire interview is transcribed later so it can be used effectively in the analysis process.
6. Be sure you know what is in the interview guide or aide memoire beforehand. Plan to have it close by during the interview so you can refer to it comfortably. When writing the final interview notes, be sure to include each question you asked and every response. During the interview, you can write the number of the question beside the response rather than writing out the whole question. You need to record in full any questions you ask in addition to those in the interview guide. Include these additional questions in the final write-up as well.
7. Decide on the code name or number you are going to use.

As you begin the interview

1. Introduce yourself and describe the project again. Use the project description as an introductory handout.
2. Explain how the interview will remain confidential.
3. Briefly describe the topics you will cover.

4. Ask the informant to help you with the necessary demographic data for the face sheet that accompanies each interview. Sometimes completing the face sheet before the interview helps to "loosen" things up. However, some researchers feel more comfortable asking these kinds of questions at the close of the interview after a trust has been established. Reassure the informants about research confidentiality. If they are still uncomfortable they may choose not to answer all the questions.
5. Tell the informants if you will be writing their responses rather than taping them. Assure them that if you have trouble keeping up you will ask them to slow down a bit.
6. Remind your informants that you are interested in their experience and their story. Make it clear there are no right or wrong statements. Remind yourself not to argue with your informants, or use them to prove or disprove personal theories!

During the interview

1. Record the informants' actual words by writing in the first person (use "I" not "s/he"). Do not write your opinion of what the informants say. Develop your own shorthand so you can write every word they say.
2. Listen carefully, but remember that since the interview is a kind of conversation you can relate to the informant in that way. Go where the informant leads you, but be disciplined so you don't go off topic...or stay off for very long. This means you may have to say "That's an interesting view, but let's get back to. . ."
3. If the informants seem uncomfortable, try to find out why. Is it your manner? Do they misunderstand the purpose of the interview? Perhaps they don't feel what they want to say is acceptable. Reassure them again that there are no right or wrong answers.
4. Don't worry about silences. Wait for the informant to decide what to say. Often what comes after a silence is very significant.
5. It is important that the informants focus on their own experience. If they talk about everyone else but themselves you can ask "How did you feel about that?" or "What did you do?"
6. Draw out information by using more questions or asking for clarification. Phrases such as "Could you tell me more about that?" are useful.
7. If the informant does not want to discuss a certain topic or question, do not push for a response. Instead, try, gently, to find out why they don't want to talk about it. Record this in your notes.

8. Depending on the topic, interviews can sometimes be upsetting. At the very least, the informant may feel vulnerable at having shared personal information. At the close of the interview you may want to ask the informants how they are feeling. If it's appropriate, tell the informants they can get in touch with you if they think of anything else, or if they just want to talk.
9. Thank them for their time, information, and for agreeing to talk to you.

After the interview

1. Write up the interview notes as soon as possible after the interview, preferably on the same day. The longer you wait the more you will forget.
2. Type or write the interview in legible ink that is copyable. Be sure to double space.
3. Write the interview notes in the same way you did the interview. Begin by writing down the first question you asked, then write the response to to that question. If you used probes other than those in the aide memoire or interview guide, be sure to write them down as well. Write in the first person, using "I" rather than "s/he."
4. Add your own comments as appropriate. For example, if the interview was interrupted by the arrival of children, you could note "Children came home half way through the interview and informant was less focussed afterwards."
5. Write the code on the interview. Make a copy of the written-up interview. File the original in a master file and use the coded copy for ongoing work.
6. Write a thank-you note to the informant.

HOW TO ADMINISTER A QUESTIONNAIRE

Before you start

1. Contact informants and make arrangements for them to receive the questionnaire. If they are to fill it out while you are there, you may wish to arrange an appointment time when they are alone, without partner, children or colleagues around. Be sure to get their full name and home address so you can send them a thank-you letter afterwards.
2. Be clear about how much time you think it will take for them to complete questionnaire.
3. Decide on the code name or number you are going to use.
4. If you are sending out questionnaires for informants to mail back, include a covering letter that explains the research you are doing. Tell the informants about the steps you are taking to keep questionnaires confidential. Remind them of the date by which you need the questionnaires. Make it easy for them to return the questionnaires by including a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Keep a master list of the questionnaires you sent out, and the number that came back.

As you begin

1. Introduce the project and yourself. Use the project description as an introductory handout.
2. Explain how the questionnaire will remain confidential.
3. Ask the informant to help you with the necessary demographics for the face sheet that will accompany the questionnaire. See page 53 for information on demographics.
4. If the informants seem uncomfortable try to find out why, and make a note of it. Is it you? Do they misunderstand the purpose of the research? Are they worried that you will ask them questions they might not have answers to? Are they feeling that the questions are intrusive?

Reassure the informants by explaining that there are no right or wrong answers. Tell them that they don't have to answer anything they don't want to, or feel they can't.

During the administration of the questionnaire

1. Explain any unclear questions to informants.
2. When they have completed the questionnaire, thank them for their time, information and for agreeing to be involved.

Afterwards

1. Check the completed questionnaire to be sure the answers are clear and complete. Contact the informant for clarification if necessary.
2. Make a copy of the completed questionnaire. File the original in a master file and use the copy for ongoing work.
3. Write a thank-you note to the informant.

HOW TO FACILITATE A FOCUS GROUP

Before you start

1. Contact the potential participants. Explain the research goals and ask them if they would agree to participate. Briefly describe the topic to be covered. Explain the confidentiality arrangements.
2. Prepare an aide memoire, or discussion guide.
3. Decide which researcher will facilitate the group and who will take notes of the discussion. Notes can be written on a flipchart or in a notebook.
4. Be sure to have the necessary equipment (flipchart, pens, tape etc.) on hand.
5. Arrange the seating so that the participants sit facing each other.
6. You may want to provide coffee and muffins.

During the discussion

1. Remind participants that you are interested in their experience and their stories. Make it clear that there are no right or wrong statements. Do not argue with the views they put forward.
2. Keep the group on the topic, but be open to a wide-ranging discussion.
3. Don't worry about silences.
4. Draw out information by asking the person more questions or inviting the person to say more. Tell participants they can do the same.
5. Depending on the topic, discussions can sometimes be upsetting. Participants can feel vulnerable at sharing personal information. Be supportive.
6. At the close of the discussion, ask participants for feedback. Ask them if the discussion has missed anything.
7. Thank them all for their time and their contribution. Explain how you plan to let them know about the results of the research.

After the discussion

1. Write up the discussion notes as soon as possible.
2. Type, or write in legible ink that is copyable. Be sure to double space.
3. Add facilitator notes as appropriate.
4. Make a copy of the notes. File the original and use the copy for ongoing work.
5. Write a thank you note to each participant.

EXAMPLE OF A QUESTIONNAIRE

Here is the questionnaire developed for the research described in the information matrix on page 29.

PARENTS' MINI SURVEY

We are asking parents to help us in planning quality affordable for children and families in this community area.

1. How many children do you have and what are their ages?

   0 - 18 months ____
   19 mo - 3 yrs ____
   4 - 5 yrs ____
   6 - 12 yrs ____

2. Are you employed? Yes____ No____

   Part time ____
   Full time ____
   Seasonal ____
   Other ____

3. Do you need child care when you're working or will you be needing childcare in the future?

   Yes ____ (If yes, please continue on)
   No ____ (If no, go on to question 7 for preschool aged children and/or question 12 for school aged children)

4. Would you prefer child care in:

   Your home ____ Neighbour/friend's home ____
   A relative's home ____ Daycare centre ____

5. When do you need child care?

Day of week		*Times needed*		*Day of week*		*Times needed*	
Monday	____	from ____	to ____	Friday	____	from ____	to ____
Tuesday	____	from ____	to ____	Saturday	____	from ____	to ____
Wednesday	____	from ____	to ____	Sunday	____	from ____	to ____
Thursday	____	from ____	to ____				

6. In other areas the fees for full time monthly care are:

A neighbour/ friend's home	*infants - 18 mo*	*$400*
	19 mo - 3 yrs	*$350*
	3 - 5 yrs	*$300*
Daycare centres	*infants - 18 mo*	*$600*
	19 mo - 3 yrs	*$500*
	3 - 5 yrs	*$400*
School age child care	*6 - 12 yrs*	*$130*

A. Can you afford to pay this amount? Yes____ No____

B. If no, what can you afford to pay each month? _____

C. Are these costs what you expected? _____

IF THEY HAVE PRESCHOOLERS (3 - 5 Yrs)

7. Would you enrol your child in programs for preschool aged children? Yes____ No____

8. If no, why not _____

9. If yes, would you prefer (a) a regular preschool ____
or would you prefer (b) an ESL [English as a Second Language] preschool ____

10. Would you prefer:
2 mornings/afternoons per week? ____
3 mornings/afternoons per week? ____
5 mornings/afternoons per week? ____

11. In some preschools the monthly fees are:

2 mornings/week	*$32*
3 mornings/week	*$48*
5 mornings/week	*$80*

A. Can you afford to pay this amount? Yes____ No____

B. If no, what can you afford to pay? _____

C. Are these costs what you expected? _____

IF THEY HAVE CHILDREN IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (6 - 12 yrs)

12. Would you enrol your child in programs after school? Yes____ No____

13. If no, why not?_____

14. If yes, then where would be most convenient for your child?
    A. In their school? ____ B. Community Centre ____
    C. In the local library? ____ D. Other places? ____

15. What kinds of programs would you/your child like?
    A. Sports: volleyball____ baseball____ soccer____ other____
    B. Music and dance ____
    C. Arts and crafts ____
    D. Cooking ____
    E. Drop in programs (i.e. a variety of different activities available for children to visit) ____
    F. Club activities on a scheduled day and time where children are involved with group leaders in planning a variety of activities? ____
    G. Other (your suggestions)_____

16. When could your children participate?
    Monday ___
    Tuesday ___
    Wednesday ___
    Thursday ___
    Friday ___

17. Would you enrol your child in some of these activities on the weekends? Yes____ No____
    If yes, then: Saturdays ____ and/or Sundays ____

18. Some of these programs cost $10 monthly. Can you afford to pay this? Yes____ No____

19. If no, what can you afford? _____

20. Are these costs what you expected? _____

Thank you very much for answering these questions. Your information will help us in planning children's programs.

EXAMPLE OF A FACE SHEET

The information we are asking for on this sheet will be kept confidential. It will be used to help us plan and develop new services and programs at _____. We appreciate your co-operation.

Code _____ Date _____

Address _____ Interviewer _____

How long at this address? _____ How long in this area of community? _____

Marital status
- ____ Single
- ____ Married
- ____ Separated
- ____ Divorced
- ____ Common Law

Age group
- ____ 15 - 24
- ____ 25 - 34
- ____ 35 - 44
- ____ 45 - 64
- ____ 65+

Education
- ____ High School
- ____ College
- ____ University
- ____ Other (specify)_____

Number of children and ages
- 0 - 3 yrs ____
- 3 - 6 yrs ____
- 6 - 12 yrs ____
- 12 - 18 yrs ____

Do you work for wages? Yes _____ part time _____ full time _____
No _____

If yes, what is your occupation?_____

What is your income level?

____ less than $5,000
____ $5,000 - $10,000
____ $10,000 - 15,000
____ $15,000 - 20,000
____ $20,000 - 25,000
____ $25,000 - 30,000
____ over $30,000
____ no response

If no, what is your source of income?

____ Unemployment Insurance
____ Social Assistance
____ Pension
____ Other (specify)

Does your spouse/partner work for wages?

Yes _____ part time _____ full time _____

No _____

If yes, what is his/her occupation _____

What is his/her income level?

____ less than $5,000
____ $5,000 - 10,000
____ $10,000 - 15,000
____ $15,000 - 20,000
____ $20,000 - 25,000
____ $25,000 - 30,000
____ over $30,000

If no, what is his/her source of income?

____ Unemployment Insurance
____ Social Assistance
____ Pension
____ Other (specify)_____

PRODUCING A RESEARCH REPORT

It's important to consider what kind of publication you want to produce and to know what the production involves. The following publication planning sheet and production check list will be useful.

Publication Planning Sheet

1. Who is the publication for? How would you describe the primary intended audience? How many people are in the intended audience? How many of them do you want to reach?
2. What is the purpose of the publication - what are you trying to do with it? What information are you providing? What do you want users to do after they've read it?
3. How will it be used? (Read, photocopied, shelved?)
4. Will it need frequent updating?
5. What other publications or information are in the same field? How is this one different?
6. Do you want graphics? What kind? What do you want the graphics to do - attract attention, reinforce certain points, look nice?
7. How are you going to reach your target audience? Think about how they usually get information. Do they get information at libraries, bookstores, community centres, doctors' offices?
8. What are you going to do about promotion, marketing and distribution? How about a flyer for upcoming conferences and workshops, or reviews in magazines or journals, or mailouts, etc? How will you respond to requests for the publication? Can you set up a distribution system?
9. What do you want to charge for your publication? Would you give some people free copies or discounts? Do you have to cover your costs? Will you be able to pay for reprinting?
10. What size should the book be? What kind of format?
11. Who holds copyright?
12. What are the time constraints? Will it go out of date? When is it needed?
13. When will the first draft be ready? The final draft? Be realistic. Allow time for revisions.

Production and Distribution Checklist

TASK	BY WHOM?	BY WHAT DATE?
1. Publication planning sheet completed	_____	_____
2. Draft manuscript		
a. prepared	_____	_____
b. reviewed	_____	_____
c. comments incorporated	_____	_____
3. Second draft manuscript		
a. prepared	_____	_____
b. comments incorporated	_____	_____
c. edit	_____	_____
4. Copy edit done	_____	_____
a. corrections incorporated	_____	_____
5. Design		
a. type	_____	_____
b. graphics	_____	_____
c. overall rough mockup approved	_____	_____
6. Type set	_____	_____
7. Proofread		
a. first set of galleys	_____	_____
b. corrections set	_____	_____
c. corrections proofed	_____	_____
d. second set of corrections	_____	_____
e. second set proofed	_____	_____
8. Layout		
a. layout done	_____	_____
b. layout proofread	_____	_____
c. corrections made	_____	_____
d. corrections proofread	_____	_____
9. Printing estimates and arrangements done	_____	_____
10. Layout approved	_____	_____
11. Printing done	_____	_____
12. Pricing policy set	_____	_____
13. Promotion, advertising done	_____	_____
14. Distribution arranged	_____	_____

Guide to Writing the Report

What goes into a final research report

The basics of organizing a research report are contained in the following outline:

Acknowledgements

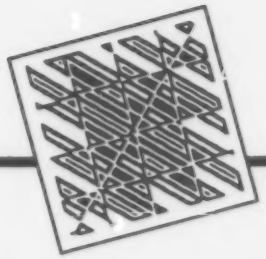
Table of Contents

1. Introduction to the research. Describe:
   a. How the research came about, how it was funded.
   b. What the purpose of the research was.
   c. Who was involved.
   d. The context in which the research was done.
2. Description of research methodology. Describe:
   a. The research approach that was used and why it was chosen.
   b. Research goals and objectives.
   c. How the research data gathering tools were designed and used.
   d. Confidentiality.
   e. How informants were chosen, how many and why, range of people included, who did the interviewing.
   f. Any limitations to the research.
3. Analysis of research findings
   a. Describe the different research topic areas.
   b. Note the results in each area from the data gathered.
   c. In examining the answers to the research questions, describe the differences and similarities in patterns of response from informants.
   d. Describe how you drew your conclusions.
   e. Do not try to cover every aspect of everything. Pick out patterns and analyse them.
4. Conclusion
   a. Conclude with a summary of your analysis of the research findings.
   b. Include recommendations for further work arising out of the research.
5. Bibliography, Appendixes.

How to write a research report

- The research committee should talk about what to include in a report. This will depend on who the report is for. For example, if the report is for internal use only, then a formal written report may not be useful - perhaps a summary of research findings with recommendations would be more appropriate.
- Generally speaking, writing takes about twice as long as the data collection. It is crucial to allow enough time to write the report well. Don't scrimp with your writing time!
- Begin with an outline. An outline is a series of headings with point form statements about content under each heading. Most likely the headings will break into sections dealing with responses to all the specific research questions or theme areas.
- Let the data tell you what to write. For example, when you have analysed the data (from the interviews, questionnaires, focus groups or drawings), done your key word analysis, and completed the literature review, you will see some patterns emerging. That's when you see what you have to say.
- Write an outline for each of the theme areas or sections, then start to flesh it out with:
  - points of comparison ("one person said _____, three others said_____", "one agency did_____, two others did _____")
  - references to the literature, ("a similar study notes. . .)
  - direct quotes from the interviews, ("as one informant said, _____")
  - your own thoughts and conclusions.

  Note: Protect informant confidentiality in the writing stage by removing any unneeded reference points that might identify the person, such as names of towns, positions held, places worked for, etc.
- You will eventually need to introduce and summarize each section. But first work on getting the content of each section clear.
- Be prepared to change and re-write outlines and sections many times. You will also likely write several drafts of the report.
- By the time you write the final draft the sections should be organized so they flow logically from one to another.
- Remember to allow time and money for word processing. Allow time for writing several drafts, editing, proofreading, printing and binding. You'll also need time to write things such things as an abstract, table of contents, footnotes page, bibliography, etc.
- Be sure to include information in the report about its cost and where copies can be obtained.



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APPENDIX A WHAT THE WORDS MEAN

Action research:	the systematic collection and analysis of information on a specific topic in order to further social change
Aide memoire:	an aid to memory, a list of topics or issues to be covered in each interview
Analysis:	the process of bringing order to the data, organizing what is there into patterns, categories, or basic descriptive units
Assumptions:	statements of those things you believe are true
Bias:	a distortion of research results by neglected or undeclared factors
Context:	circumstances, environment, or setting
Data:	the facts or information about a particular situation, issue, or problem
Demographic data:	statistics illustrating conditions of people's lives in a community, i.e. gender, education, income
Facilitator:	a person who guides a group discussion
Goals:	general statements about what you are trying to accomplish
Informants:	those people who are interviewed (sometimes called interviewees or respondents) to provide information
Informed consent:	agreement to participate in research based on all the available information that might influence the person's decision
Interview guide:	a list or series of open-ended questions for interviewers to ask of informants in each interview
Interpretation:	attaching meaning and significance to the analysis; explaining patterns, relationships and linkages among facts, descriptions, etc.
Methodology:	an operational framework, design or plan with specified rules and controls that govern the research process
Objectives:	specific, measurable statements of what you want to accomplish by a given point in time

Objective approach:	an approach that values the views and opinions of those outside of or distanced from a situation, event, community, etc.
Organizing:	working to assist and encourage peop!e to take action on issues that affect their lives
Participatory action research:	a community directed process of collecting and analysing information on an issue or situation for the purpose of taking action and making change
Qualitative approach:	the collection of data or information (by means of open-ended interviews, e.g.) that provides a detailed description of a situation, community or problem as the basis for developing an analysis
Quantitative approach:	the collection of data or information (by means of questionnaires, structured interviews, or counting, e.g.) that provides an account of the size of the situation or problem based on numbers or statistics
Questionnaire:	a series of specific questions (often with a checklist of possible answers for respondents to choose from)
Research:	the systematic collection and analysis of information on a particular topic
Statistics:	information gathered from counting the number of people holding similar views, having a similar experience of a situation, problem, community, etc.
Subjective approach:	an approach that values the views and experience of the participants and actors involved in a situation, event, community, etc.
Survey:	systematic investigation of people's attitudes, behaviours, and demographics, using interviews, questionnaires, etc.
Systematic:	methodical, according to a plan, not casual or unintentional

APPENDIX B DOUBLE CHECK: IS RESEARCH THE RIGHT WAY TO GO?

Our experience with many groups over the years tells us that sometimes people decide to do research when in fact, research isn't what is needed.

How do you know that research is the right strategy to reach your goals and objectives?

- Research should be done when action is required and research is needed to inform the action.
- Don't do research simply out of curiosity about a problem or issue, or with the idea that research by itself can solve problems.
- Do research if you have a practical need for information and analysis.
- Do research if you need it to make your work and actions more effective.
- Action research is not an end in itself. Research is a tool or strategy community groups can use in their everyday work with people.

As well as the strategy testing methods listed in Appendix D, test your decision to do research by considering the following:

1. What questions do we have that we want answers to?
2. What information do we need to answer the questions?
3. How can we get that information?

Asking these questions will help you know if research is really what is needed. Sometimes, even if you have the resources and capacity to do research, it turns out that research is not what is really needed to solve a problem or deal with an issue. Better to find this out sooner rather than later!

Situation: Several years ago, workers at a transition house realized that they're were hearing more from residents about child sexual abuse of their children, and more of residents' own history of child sexual abuse.

This was new to them. Before this, the topic hadn't ever come up.

Concerns: Workers were concerned about their own lack of knowledge of this emerging issue. But, there was another wrinkle. The books on child sexual abuse that some staff had been reading didn't seem to reflect what women at the transition house were saying. What's more, there seemed to be different difficulties for women whose abusers had also sexually abused their children.

Looking at solutions: The transition house staff agreed to a work objective that said: "We will, over the next year, become more knowledgeable about the dynamics of child sexual abuse as it relates to transition house residents and their children."

There were a number of strategies workers used to meet that objective - doing research was one strategy, but not the only one.

They used the three questions in order to decide what to do:

1. What's the question that workers can get answers to?

- "How can we get the information and analysis we need to become more knowledgeable about child sexual abuse as it relates to transition house residents and their children?"

2. What information do we need to answer the question?

- Is there a basic training program or course on child sexual abuse that we can take so we know more about the issue?
- What have other transition houses workers experienced around this?
- What *is* the experience of child sexual abuse that battered women are telling us about? How is it different from what we have read in the literature. What are the special circumstances that seem to be making our usual peer counselling techniques less effective?

3. How can workers get that information?

- Investigate courses offered through other social service agencies, colleges - would they be useful? (a non-research route)
- Can we make some calls and compare information? Can we learn something from one another? If so, perhaps our action should be a joint workshop or meeting. Or maybe we can agree to ask for a workshop on the issue at the next transition house conference. (This workshop would be a kind of "informal research". It may or may not lead to a formal research process).
- Would documenting and analyzing the women's experience be useful? Would this give us the information we need to be more effective? Is this something the transition house can actually do? (A "yes" to these questions involves doing formal research.)

To make the decision to do research or not, ask:

- Is research what we really need to do?
- Why? (at the very least it should help you meet your overall planning objective!)
- What questions do we need answers to?
- Where can we go to get that information?
- Are we the ones to carry it out?
- Do we have, or can we get, the resources needed to carry it out?
- How would we use the research results?

If you've done your planning, and decided to do research as a strategy, you can move ahead.

APPENDIX C GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals are general statements of what you are trying to accomplish.

They are stated quite literally. For example a goal for a group providing home-care to people with HIV/AIDS might say, "We are working to help people with HIV/AIDS to live in their own homes for as long as they can."

The goal of a HIV/AIDS advocacy group working on human rights promotion and protection might be, "We are trying to get all governments, both federal and provincial, to amend their Human Rights Acts to prohibit discrimination based on HIV infection or perceived HIV infection."

The goal of an education group working on the issue of elder abuse might be, "We are trying to educate the local media on this issue."

Objectives are specific, measurable statements of what you want to accomplish by a given point in time.

This is where you can describe the nitty gritty of what you want to do. Objectives should not be general statements. They must be as specific as possible.

* A service group working to start a hospice might have several objectives, the first of which might be to provide quality care for members of its target group.
* An education group working on elder abuse might have an objective that says, "We will offer two workshops on two important aspects of elder abuse in our community between September and November."
* An advocacy group for seniors might decide that one of its objectives is, "In the next three months we will train an advocacy team from our community."

Objectives are usually directed to changing the knowledge, skill, attitudes or practices of people, or they may aim at maintaining or changing a condition of the community or organization.

Try to make your objectives time-limited if possible. This helps keep your work realistic. Avoid writing two objectives in one. Keep the objectives separate and then the work you undertake to meet each objective can be efficiently planned.

(Adapted from Dorothy Craig's Hip Pocket Guide to Planning and Evaluation, Learning Concepts, University Associates 1978)

APPENDIX D WAYS TO TEST STRATEGIES, OR "HOW DO WE KNOW WE SHOULD DO THIS?"

Testing for pros and cons

Take a piece of paper and write the strategy across the top of the page. Draw a line down the middle of the page. Write "helping forces" on one side, "hindering forces" on the other. List all the things that will help and hinder you from reaching your strategy or objective. Ask yourselves:

- Do we have any influence over any of the forces?
- Can the impact of the helping forces be increased?
- Can the impact of the hindering forces be decreased?
- What new helping forces can we create?

Resource review

Down the side of a piece of paper list all the resources necessary to carry out one of your strategies. Include PERSONNEL, MONEY, EQUIPMENT, FACILITIES, TIME, KNOWLEDGE, SKILL, POLITICAL INFLUENCE, ENERGY, INFORMATION, etc.

Across the top of the same piece of paper write the following headings: IS THIS RESOURCE NEEDED FOR THIS STRATEGY? DO WE HAVE THIS RESOURCE - CAN WE GET THIS RESOURCE - FROM WHERE?

Filling in all the columns will tell you what resources are needed to do the work and what you have and don't have.

Evaluative questions to ask

Five key evaluative words for testing strategies are:

* ADEQUATE: given the size of the problem/issue, will doing this strategy make enough of a difference?
* APPROPRIATE: Is it right for us to do this? Is it appropriate to our organization's purpose?

* EFFECTIVE: How will this strategy help us meet our objectives?

* EFFICIENT: How costly is the strategy compared to the benefits? Are the benefits obtained worth the money and other resources used?

* SIDE EFFECTS: what good and bad side effects might happen as a result of doing this strategy?

(Adapted from Hip Pocket Guide to Planning and Evaluation, Dorothy Craig, Learning Concepts, University Associates, 1978)

APPENDIX E HOW TO DEVELOP A WORKPLAN

- A good way to develop a workplan is to start with the research objectives.
- A couple of the researchers can draft the workplan and take it to the research committee for review. It is important that everyone who is involved in doing the research takes part in making the final workplan decisions.

Remember: Trying to do too much work in too little time results in mediocre work, burned-out staff and low credibility for the organization.

Write the following headings across the top of apiece of flipchart paper:

Objectives	Tasks	Time needed	Dates	Who will do?	Resources needed

2. Write the first objective in the first column. Then in the second column list all the tasks that need to be done to meet that objective. Some groups use "Post-it notes" for this list, so they can shift them around and get them in chronological order.

3. Repeat the process for each objective. Don't forget the administrative tasks, and holding meetings, etc.

4. Go back to the first objective. Review each task and estimate how long it will take to complete. Put this information into the "time needed" column.

5. Write down when the work will start. Then decide what date to put beside each task on the list. For example, if the work begins on October 10 and the first task takes one week, then that task will be done by October 17.

   Some tasks will be going on at the same time. For example, you may decide to start the literature review early and have it continue while interviews are going on.

   Don't forget to take seasons and holidays into account.

   At this point it is common to feel surprised and overwhelmed at how long the work will actually take! If you are already working with a fixed deadline set by funders, you may have to review the research process or make a decision to negotiate for more money and time from your funders, etc.

   Remember, revising the research doesn't mean trying to do the same work in less time. It means reassessing the project and eliminating some tasks.

6. Go to the column headed, "Who will do" and put in the names of people or committees for each task. This will help you be clear about the number of people you are going to need for this work, and what their responsibilities will be.

7. Go to the "Resources needed" column and list what resources you will need to get the work done. Resources can include computers, space, materials, information, paid staff, time, volunteers, etc. etc. Estimate the cost, if appropriate, and put this figure in the column. Use this information to draw up the budget.

8. Draw a workplan timechart by month and include all the work involved to meet all the objectives. You can use the kind of basic bar chart shown in the illustration.

9. Put the workplan and the workplan timechart up where everyone can see them. Make sure everyone knows what their responsibilities are.

On the following page is an example of a rough workplan for a small research project that involves 30 interviews and a written report, with follow-up action.

EXAMPLE OF A SMALL RESEARCH PROJECT LEADING TO A PUBLICATION

Tasks (in order of completion)	Dates (weekly)												
	SEPT 1 2 3 4	OCT 1 2 3 4	NOV 1 2 3 4	DEC 1 2 3 4	JAN 1 2 3 4	FEB 1 2 3 4	MAR 1 2 3 4	APR 1 2 3 4	MAY 1 2 3 4	JUNE 1 2 3 4	JULY 1 2 3 4	AUG 1 2 3 4	SEPT 1 2 3 4
Research committee meets (ongoing)* - complete steps 1-10													
Write research design													
Develop work plan													
Develop budget													
Start literature review (ongoing)													
Contact informants, set up interviews													
Pre-test interview/etc.													
Do interviews & write up													
Start analysis (ongoing)													
Develop first outlines													
Write draft one													
Review draft 1, discuss													
Write draft two													
Review draft 2, discuss													
Copy edit & review													
Design													
Typeset & proof read													
Layout & proof read													
Print estimates/arrgmnts.													
Printing done													
Carry out follow-up action plan on research													

APPENDIX F RESEARCH BUDGET ISSUES

Items to consider are:

Researchers:	salary and honoraria for paid staff, volunteers, consultants, etc.
Space:	renting separate space? renting space from local group? what about light and heat bills?
Time:	how long will the project run?
Evaluation:	build in the costs of staff time or committee time to do the evaluation of the research process; also add the cost of any consulting help you will need.
Supplies:	stationery, file cabinets, copypaper/word processing paper.
Machinery:	access to or rental of typewriter, copier, word processor.
Telephone:	long distance bills if you'll be contacting informants and others by phone, plus regular monthly phone bill.
Resource materials:	what's the cost of books, films, etc. you will need for the literature review?
Travel costs:	mileage costs, airfares, other travel needs?
Publishing costs:	if you're going to prepare a report, be sure to include the cost of typing/processing, editing, proofing, design, layout, printing, promotion and distribution.

APPENDIX G QUALIFICATIONS AND HIRING OF RESEARCHERS

Number of staff required

The number of researchers varies with each research process. At the very least you'll need a research co-ordinator. In our experience committed volunteers are able to complete much of the interviewing and literature review, but it does take longer because volunteers are usually able to commit less time than paid workers. The group should weigh the pros and cons of paid versus unpaid staff in light of its needs and funding realities.

Researcher's qualifications

Previous research training is not a necessary prerequisite for working with action research. This is one of its great strengths for community based organizations.

It's easy to learn the action research methods we've outlined in this guide. You can choose to hire and train people who have no previous research experience but who are enthusiastic about the work. Learning action research skills will be of use to them after the work is completed. Be sure to build in time and money to do training.

The qualifications of researchers also depend on the nature of the research. For example, an understanding of the issue would no doubt be a qualification. Experience in actually working with the research population may also be a requirement.

Review your preliminary ideas about suitable ways of collecting information to identify some of the skills your research team should have. For examples, if statistics or counting (i.e. how many women came to a workshop) is only a minor part of what the groups needs to know, people with major strengths in statistics will not be appropriate. If interviews are a priority, the researcher will need to have skills and experience in that method of collecting information.

Researcher training

Usually several one or two day training sessions are needed - one at the beginning, another just prior to gathering the data, and a final session early on in the data analysis process.

APPENDIX H RESEARCH ETHICS

Informed consent

We all have a right to all the information that might influence our decision to take part in a research project. We have the right to give informed consent.

Informed consent involves making sure that potential informants understand

- What the research is about
- How the researchers intend to use the information
- How confidentiality will be protected

Here are some steps you can take to make sure that informants know what they are consenting to:

- Prepare a statement that describes the research aims and methodology, and how you plan to ensure confidentiality. You can give this, or read it, to potential informants. It's a good idea to re-read this information to an informant just before the interview.
- Be prepared to answer further questions potential informants may have about the research. Do not, however, betray anyone else's confidentiality. For example, if a potential informant wanted to know the names of the other people you are interviewing, you could not give that kind of information. But you could describe the range and number of people you are interviewing. Similarly, do not discuss any research findings with informants before the analysis is finished. Tell them you'll be glad to send them a copy of whatever summary of the research findings you produce.

Confidentiality

- You need to take care to protect people's privacy. Sensitive issues may require asking sensitive questions about people's private lives. It's important to be respectful and non-judgmental. Be sure to code interviews and questionnaires so that informants remain anonymous.
- It is very important that all members of the research committee understand how critical the issue of confidentiality is. It is a matter of trust between informants and researcher. Breaking the confidentiality of the informants breaks that trust. This hurts the informants. it also can hurt the group doing the research. It may make it difficult for the group to build community trust again.

Page 58 of this guide describes the steps researchers must take to make sure the information they receive from informants remains confidential. These steps must be followed or the promise of confidentiality is a hollow one.

Voluntary participation in the research

- Potential informants must always feel that their involvement in the research process is truly voluntary. Never pressure someone to be involved.
- Researchers should also be careful how they involve informants in the research when the research population is from one place—such as a hospice, transition house or daycare centre—or when there are people involved who may not feel free to refuse to participate—such as patients or prisoners. Potential informants must understand that they have the right not to participate and that they will not be penalized for saying no.

Payment of informants

The research approach described in the this guide does not usually involve paying people for taking the time to answer researchers' questions. However, if you are faced with a decision about whether or not to pay informants, consider the following:

- Why you might pay
- What effect that might have on the information
- Will you pay all informants? Some of them? How will you select each group? How much will you pay?

APPENDIX I USEFUL REFERENCE BOOKS

A PLANNING HANDBOOK FOR WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS, Saskatchewan Women's Resources, 2398 Scarth Street, Regina, Saskatchewan, S4P 2J7, no date

EFFECTIVE EVALUATION: IMPROVING THE USEFULNESS OF EVALUATION RESULTS THROUGH RESPONSIVE AND NATURALISTIC APPROACHES, Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln, Jossey Bass Publications, 1981

EXPERIENCE, RESEARCH, SOCIAL CHANGE: METHODS FROM THE MARGINS, Sandra Kirby, Kate McKenna, Garamond Press, 1989

HIP POCKET GUIDE TO PLANNING AND EVALUATION, Dorothy Craig, Pfeiffer & Company, University Associates, 4190 Fairview Street, Burlington Ontario, L7L 4Y8, 1978

HOW TO STUDY YOUR OWN COMMUNITY: RESEARCH FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN, Helga Jacobson, Women's Research Centre, 1977

KEEPING ON TRACK: AN EVALUATION GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS, Diana Ellis, Gayla Reid, Jan Barnsley, Women's Research Centre, 1990

MARKETING AND DISTRIBUTION: A GUIDE FOR NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS, Trace Porteous and Kathryn Rowe, Victoria Women's Sexual Assault Centre, 1986

METHODS IN BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH, Paul Cosby, Mayfield Publishing, 1989 (for information on quantitative methods)

QUALITATIVE EVALUATION METHODS, Michael Patton, Sage Publications, 1980

STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE: FROM WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE TO A PLAN FOR ACTION, Debra Lewis and Jan Barnsley, Women's Research Centre, 1990

WOMEN'S WORDS: The Feminist Practice of Oral History, Black, Patai (eds), Routledge, 1991

The Women's Research Centre is a community-based feminist organization focused on research that makes visible women's experience and facilitates action on women's issues. We have published guides on action research, strategy development, and evaluation methods. We have conducted research and produced publications on violence against women, and on economic issues, including pay equity. We also assist groups to develop their own projects.

Contact the Centre for a complete list of our publications.

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We would appreciate receiving feedback from the readers of *Research for Change*. Please send us your comments on the book. How was it useful? How can it be improved? What further work in this area would be useful to you?

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